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Fantasy and Science Fiction

35¢ JANUARY

The Cosmic Charge Account

a short novelet by

C. M. KORNBLUTH

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

MANLY WADE WELLMAN

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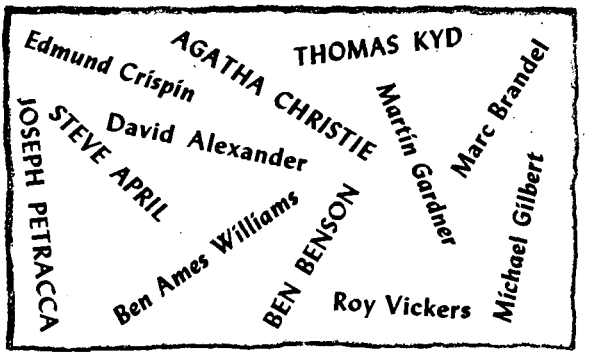

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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The Cosmic Charge Account

by C. M. KORNBLUTH

THE LACKAWANNA WAS STILL RUNning one cautious morning train a day into Scranton, though the city was said to be emptying fast. Professor Leuten and I had a coach to ourselves, except for a scared, jittery trainman who hung around and talked at us.

"The name's Pech," he said. "And let me tell you, the Peches have been around for a mighty long time in these parts. There's a town twenty-three miles north of Scranton named Pechville. Full of my cousins and aunts and uncles, and I used to visit there and we used to send picture post cards and get them, too. But my God, mister, what's happened to them?"

His question was rhetorical. He didn't realize that Professor Leuten and I happened to be the only two people outside the miscalled Plague Area who could probably answer it.

"Mr. Pech," I said, "if you don't mind we'd like to talk some business."

"Sorry," he said miserably, and went on to the next car.

When we were alone Professor Leuten remarked: "An interesting reaction." He was very smooth about it. Without the slightest warning he whipped a huge, writhing, hairy spider from his pocket and thrust it at my face.

I was fast on the draw too. In one violent fling I was standing on my left foot in the aisle, thumbing my nose, my tongue stuck out. Gooseflesh rippled down my neck and shoulders.

"Very good," he said, and put the spider away. It was damnably realistic. Even knowing that it was a gadget of twisted springs and plush, I cringed at the thought of its nestling in his pocket. With me it

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was spiders. With the professor it was rats and asphyxiation. Toward the end of our mutual training program it took only one part per million of sulfur dioxide gas in his vicinity to send him whirling into the posture of defense, crane-like on one leg, tongue out and thumb to nose, the sweat of terror on his brow.

"I have something to tell you, Professor," I said.

"So?" he asked tolerantly. And that did it. The tolerance. I had been prepared to make my point with a dignified recital and apology, but there were two ways to tell the story and I suddenly chose the second.

"You're a phoney," I said with satisfaction.

"*What?*" he gasped.

"A phoney. A fake. A hoaxer. A self-deluding crackpot. Your Functional Epistemology is a farce. Let's not go into this thing kidding ourselves."

His accent thickened a little. "Led me remind you, Mr. Norris, that you are addressing a Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Göttingen and a member of the faculty of the University of Basle."

"You mean a *privat-dozent* who teaches freshman logic. And I seem to remember that Göttingen revoked your degree."

He said slowly: "I have known all along that you were a fool, Mr. Norris. Not until now did I realize that you are also an anti-Semite. It was the Nazis who went through an illegal ceremony of revocation."

"So that makes me an anti-Semite. From a teacher of logic that's very funny."

"You are correct," he said after a long pause. "I withdraw my remark. Now, would you be good enough to amplify yours?"

"Gladly, Professor. In the first place —"

I had been winding up the rubber rat in my pocket. I yanked it out and tossed it into his lap where it scrabbled and clawed. He yelled with terror, but the yell didn't cost him a split second. Almost before it started from his throat he was standing one-legged, thumb to nose, tongue stuck out.

He thanked me coldly, I congratulated him coldly, I pocketed the rat while he shuddered and we went on with the conversation.

I told him how, eighteen months ago, Mr. Hopedale called me into his office. Nice office, oak panels, signed pictures of Hopedale Press writers from our glorious past: Kipling, Barrie, Theodore Roosevelt and the rest of the backlog boys.

What about Eino Elekinen, Mr. Hopedale wanted to know. Eino was one of our novelists. His first, *Vinland The Good*, had been a critical success and a popular flop; *Cubs of the Viking Breed*, the sequel, made us all a little money. He was now a month past delivery date on the final volume of the trilogy and the end was not in sight.

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"I think he's pulling a sit-down strike, Mr. Hopedale. He's way overdrawn now and I had to refuse him a thousand-dollar advance. He wanted to send his wife to the Virgin Islands for a divorce."

"Give him the money," Mr. Hopedale said impatiently. "How can you expect the man to write when he's beset by personal difficulties?"

"Mr. Hopedale," I said politely, "she could divorce him right here in New York State. He's given her grounds in all five boroughs and the western townships of Long Island. But that's not the point. He can't write. And even if he could, the last thing American literature needs right now is another trilogy about a Scandinavian immigrant family."

"I know," he said. "I know. He's not very good yet. But I think he's going to be, and do you want him to starve while he's getting the juvenilia out of his system?" His next remark had nothing to do with Elekinen. He looked at the signed photo of T. R. — "*To a bully publisher* —" and said: "Norris we're broke."

I said: "Ah?"

"We owe everybody. Printer, papermill, warehouse. Everybody. It's the end of Hopedale Press. Unless — I don't want you to think people have been reporting on you, Norris, but I understand you came up with an interesting idea at lunch yesterday. Some Swiss professor."

I had to think hard. "You must mean Leuten, Mr. Hopedale. No, there's nothing in it for us, sir. I was joking. My brother — he teaches philosophy at Columbia — mentioned him to me. Leuten's a crackpot. Every year or two Weintraub Verlag in Basle brings out another volume of his watchamacallit and they sell about a thousand. Functional Epistemology — my brother says it's all nonsense, the kind of stuff vanity presses put out. It was just a gag about us turning him into a Schweitzer or a Toynbee and bringing out a one-volume condensation. People just buy his books — I suppose — because they got started and feel ashamed to stop."

Mr. Hopedale said: "Do it, Norris. Do it. We can scrape together enough cash for one big promotion and then — the end. I'm going to see Brewster of Commercial Factors in the morning. I believe he will advance us sixty-five per cent on our accounts receivable." He tried on a cynical smile. It didn't become him. "Norris, you are what is technically called a Publisher's Bright Young Man. We can get seven-fifty for a scholarly book. With luck and promotion we can sell in the hundred-thousands. Get on it." I nodded, feeling sick, and started out. Mr. Hopedale said in a tired voice: "And it might actually be work of some inspirational value."

Professor Leuten sat and listened, red-faced, breathing hard. "You —

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betrayer," he said at last. "You with the smiling face that came to Basle, that talked of lectures in America, that told me to sign your damnable contract. My face on the cover of the *Time* magazine that looks like a monkey, the idiotic interviews, the press releasements in my name that I never saw. America, I thought, and held my tongue. But — from the beginning — it was — a lie!" He buried his face in his hands and muttered: "*Ach!* You stink!"

That reminded me. I took a small stench-bomb from my pocket and crushed it.

He leaped up, balanced on one leg and thumbed his nose. His tongue was out four inches and he was panting with the terror of asphyxiation.

"Very good," I said.

"Thank you. I suchest we move to the other end of the car."

We and our luggage were settled before he began to breathe normally. I judged that the panic and most of his anger had passed. "Professor," I said cautiously, "I've been thinking of what we do when — and if — we find Miss Phoebe."

"We shall complete her re-education," he said. "We shall point out that her unleashed powers have been dys-functionally applied."

"I can think of something better to do than completing her re-education. It's why I spoke a little harshly. Presumably Miss Phoebe considers you the greatest man in the world."

He smiled reminiscently and I knew what he was thinking.

La Plume, Pa.
Wednesday
Four A.M. (!)

Professor Konrad Leuten
c/o The Hopedale Press
New York City, New York

My Dear Professor,

Though you are a famous and busy man I do hope you will take time to read a few words of *grateful* tribute from an old lady (eighty-four). I have just finished your magnificent and inspirational book *How to Live on the Cosmic Expense Account: an Introduction to Functional Epistemology.*

Professor, I *believe.* I *know* every splendid word in your book is *true.* If there is one chapter finer than the others it is No. 9, "How to Be In Utter Harmony With Your Environment." The Twelve Rules in that chapter shall from this *minute* be my guiding light, and I shall practice them *faithfully* forever.

Your grateful friend,
(Miss) Phoebe Bancroft

That flattering letter reached us on Friday, one day after the papers reported with amusement or dismay the "blackout" of La Plume, Pennsylvania. The term "Plague Area" came later.

"I suppose she might," said the professor.

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"Well, think about it."

The train slowed for a turn. I noticed that the track was lined with men and women. And some of them, by God, were leaping for the moving train! Brakes went on with a squeal and jolt; my nose bashed against the seat in front of us.

"Aggression," the professor said, astonished. "But that is not in the pattern!"

We saw the trainman in the vestibule opening the door to yell at the trackside people. He was trampled as they swarmed aboard, filling, jamming the car in a twinkling.

"Got to Scranton," we heard them saying. "Zombies —"

"I get it," I shouted at the professor over their hubbub. "These are refugees from Scranton. They must have blocked the track. Right now they're probably bullying the engineer into backing up all the way to Wilkes-Barre. We've got to get off!"

"*Ja*," he said. We were in an end seat. By elbowing, crowding and a little slugging we got to the vestibule and dropped to the tracks. The professor lost all his luggage in the brief, fierce struggle. I saved only my briefcase. The powers of Hell itself were not going to separate me from that briefcase.

Hundreds of yelling, milling people were trying to climb aboard. Some made it to the roofs of the cars after it was physically impossible for one more body to be fitted inside. The locomotive uttered a despairing toot and the train began to back up.

"Well," I said, "we head north."

We found U. S. 6 after a short overland hike and trudged along the concrete. There was no traffic. Everybody with a car had left Scranton days ago, and nobody was going into Scranton. Except us.

We saw our first zombie where a signpost told us it was three miles to the city. She was a woman in a Mother Hubbard and sunbonnet. I couldn't tell whether she was young or old, beautiful or a hag. She gave us a sweet, empty smile and asked if we had any food. I said no. She said she wasn't complaining about her lot but she *was* hungry, and of course the vegetables and things were *so* much better now that they weren't poisoning the soil with those dreadful chemical fertilizers. Then she said maybe there might be something to eat down the road, wished us a pleasant good-day and went on.

"Dreadful chemical fertilizers?" I asked.

The professor said: "I believe that is a contribution by the Duchess of Carbondale to Miss Phoebe's reign. Several interviews mention it." We walked on. I could read his mind like a book. *He hasn't even read the interviews. He is a foolish, an impossible young man. And yet he is here, he has undergone a rigorous course of training, he is after all risking a sort of death. Why?* I let him go on wondering. The answer was in my briefcase.

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"When do you think we'll be in range?" I asked.

"Heaven knows," he said testily. "Too many variables. Maybe it's different when she sleeps, maybe it grows at different rates varying as the number of people affected. I feel nothing yet."

"Neither do I."

And when we felt something — specifically, when we felt Miss Phoebe Bancroft practicing the Twelve Rules of "How to be in Utter Harmony with Your Environment" — we would do something completely idiotic, something that had got us thrown — literally *thrown* — out of the office of the Secretary of Defense.

He had thundered at us: "Are you two trying to make a fool of me? Are you proposing that soldiers of the United States Army undergo a three-month training course *in sticking out their tongues and thumbing their noses?*" He was quivering with elevated blood pressure. Two M.P. lieutenants collared us under his personal orders and tossed us down the Pentagon steps when we were unable to deny that he had stated our proposal more or less correctly.

And so squads, platoons, companies, battalions and regiments marched into the Plague Area and never marched out again.

Some soldiers stumbled out as zombies. After a few days spent at a sufficient distance from the Plague Area their minds cleared and they told their confused stories. Something came over them, they said. A mental fuzziness almost impossible to describe. They liked it where they were, for instance; they left the Plague Area only by accident. They were wrapped in a vague, silly contentment even when they were hungry, which was usually. What was life like in the Plague Area? Well, not much happened. You wandered around looking for food. A lot of people looked sick but seemed to be contented. Farmers in the area gave you food with the universal silly smile, but their crops were very poor. Animal pests got most of them. Nobody seemed to eat meat. Nobody quarreled or fought or ever said a harsh word in the Plague Area. And it was hell on earth. Nothing conceivable could induce any of them to return.

The Duchess of Carbondale? Yes, sometimes she came driving by in her chariot wearing fluttery robes and a golden crown. Everybody bowed down to her. She was a big, fat middle-aged woman with rimless glasses and a pinched look of righteous triumph on her face.

The recovered zombies at first were quarantined and doctors made their wills before going to examine them. This proved to be unnecessary and the examinations proved to be fruitless. No bacteria, no rickettsia, no viruses. Nothing. Which didn't stop them from continuing in the assumption embodied in the official name of the affected counties.

Professor Leuten and I knew

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better, of course. For knowing better we were thrown out of offices, declined interviews and once almost locked up as lunatics. That was when we tried to get through to the President direct. The Secret Service, I am able to testify, guards our Chief Executive with a zeal that borders on ferocity.

"How goes the book?" Professor Leuten asked abruptly.

"Third hundred-thousand. Why? Want an advance?"

I don't understand German, but I can recognize deep, heartfelt profanity in any language. He spluttered and crackled for almost a full minute before he snarled in English: "Idiots! Dolts! Out of almost one-third of a million readers, exactly one has *read* the book!"

I wanted to defer comment on that. "There's a car," I said.

"Obviously it stalled and was abandoned by a refugee from Scranton."

"Let's have a look anyway." It was a battered old Ford sedan halfway off the pavement. The rear was full of canned goods and liquor. Somebody had been looting. I pushed the starter and cranked for a while; the motor didn't catch.

"Useless," said the professor. I ignored him, yanked the dashboard hood button and got out to inspect the guts. There was air showing on top of the gas in the sediment cup.

"We ride, professor," I told him. "I know these babies and their fuel pumps. The car quit on the upgrade there and he let it roll back." I unscrewed the clamp of the carburetor air filter, twisted the filter off and heaved it into the roadside bushes. The professor, of course was a "mere-machinery" boy with the true European intellectual's contempt for greasy hands. He stood by haughtily while I poured a bottle of gin empty, found a wrench in the toolbox that fit the gas tank drain plug and refilled the gin bottle with gasoline. He condescended to sit behind the wheel and crank the motor from time to time while I sprinkled gas into the carburetor. Each time the motor coughed there was less air showing in the sediment cup; finally the motor caught for good. I moved him over, tucked my briefcase in beside me, U-turned on the broad, empty highway and we chugged North into Scranton.

It was only natural that he edged away from me, I suppose. I was grimy from working under the gas tank. This plus the discreditable ability I had shown in starting the stalled car reminded him that he was, after all, a Herr Doktor from a *real* university while I was, after all, a publisher's employee with nebulous qualifications from some place called Cornell. The atmosphere was wrong for it, but sooner or later he had to be told.

"Professor, we've got to have a talk and get something straight before we find Miss Phoebe."

He looked at the huge striped sign the city fathers of Scranton

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wisely erected to mark that awful downgrade into the city. WARNING! SEVEN-MILE DEATH TRAP AHEAD. SHIFT INTO LOWER GEAR. $50 FINE. OBEY OR PAY!

"What is there to get straight?" he demanded. "She has partially mastered Functional Epistemology — even though Hopedale Press prefers to call it 'Living on the Cosmic Expense Account.' This has unleashed certain latent powers of hers. It is simply our task to complete her mastery of the ethical aspect of F.E. She will cease to dominate other minds as soon as she comprehends that her behavior is dys-functional and in contravention of the Principle of Permissive Evolution." To him the matter was settled. He mused: "Really I should not have let you cut so drastically my exposition of Dyadic Imbalance; that must be the root of her difficulty. A brief inductive explanation —"

"Professor," I said. "I thought I told you in the train that you're a fake."

He corrected me loftily. "You told me that you *think* I'm a fake, Mr. Norris. Naturally I was angered by your duplicity, but your opinion of me proves nothing. I ask you to look around you. Is this fakery?"

We were well into the city. Bewildered dogs yelped at our car. Windows were broken and goods were scattered on the sidewalks; here and there a house was burning brightly. Smashed and overturned cars dotted the streets, and zombies walked slowly around them. When Miss Phoebe hit a city the effects were something like a thousand-bomber raid.

"It's not fakery," I said, steering around a smiling man in a straw hat and overalls. "It isn't Functional Epistemology either. It's *faith* in Functional Epistemology. It could have been faith in anything, but your book just happened to be what she settled on."

"Are you *daring*," he demanded, white to the lips, "to compare me with the faith healers?"

"Yes," I said wearily. "They get their cures. So do lots of people. Let's roll it up in a ball, professor. I think the best thing to do when we meet Miss Phoebe is for you to tell her you're a fake. Destroy her faith in you and your system and I think she'll turn back into a normal old lady again. Wait a minute! Don't tell me you're not a fake. I can prove you are. You say she's partly mastered F.E. and gets her powers from that partial mastery. Well, presumably you've completely mastered F.E., since you invented it. So why can't you do everything she's done, and lots more? Why can't you end this mess by levitating to La Plume, instead of taking the Lackawanna and a 1941 Ford? And, by God, why couldn't you fix the Ford with a pass of the hands and F.E. instead of standing by while I worked?"

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His voice was genuinely puzzled. "I thought I just explained, Norris. Though it never occurred to me before, I suppose I could do what you say, but I wouldn't dream of it. As I said, it would be dys-functional and in complete contravention of The Principle of Permissive —"

I said something very rude and added: "In short, you can but you won't."

"Naturally not! The Principle of Permissive —" He looked at me with slow awareness dawning in his eyes. "Norris! My editor. My proof-reader. My by-the-publisher-officially-assigned *fidus Achates*. Norris, haven't *you* read my book?"

"No," I said shortly. "I've been much too busy. You didn't get on the cover of *Time* magazine by blind chance, you know."

He was laughing helplessly. "How goes that song," he finally asked me, his eyes damp, " 'God Bless America'?"

I stopped the car abruptly. "I think I feel something," I said. "Professor, I like you."

"I like you too, Norris," he told me. "Norris, my boy, what do you think of ladies?"

"Delicate creatures. Custodians of culture. Professor, what about meat-eating?"

"Shocking barbarous survival. *This is it, Norris!*"

We yanked open the doors and leaped out. We stood on one foot each, thumbed our noses and stuck out our tongues.

Allowing for the time on the train, this was the 1,961st time I had done it in the past two months. One thousand, nine hundred and sixty-one times the professor had arranged for spiders to pop out at me from books, from the television screen, from under steaks, from desk drawers, from my pockets, from his. Black widows, tarantulas, harmless (*hah!*) big house spiders, real and imitation. One thousand, nine hundred and sixty-one times I had felt the arachnophobe's horrified revulsion. Each time I felt it I had thrown major voluntary muscular systems into play by drawing up one leg violently, violently swinging my hand to my nose, violently grimacing to stick out my tongue.

My body had learned at last. There was no spider this time; there was only Miss Phoebe: a vague, pleasant feeling something like the first martini. But my posture of defense this 1,962d time was accompanied by the old rejection and horror. It had no spider, so it turned on Miss Phoebe. The vague first-martini feeling vanished like morning mist burned away by the sun.

I relaxed cautiously. On the other side of the car so did Professor Leuten. "Professor," I said, "I don't like you any more."

"Thank you," he said coldly. "Nor do I like you."

"I guess we're back to normal," I said. "Climb in." He climbed in and we started off. I grudgingly said: "Congratulations."

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"Because it worked? Don't be ridiculous. It was to be expected that a plan of campaign derived from the principles of Functional Epistemology would be successful. All that was required was that you be at least as smart as one of Professor Pavlov's dogs, and I admit I considered that hypothesis the weak link in my chain of reasoning. . . ."

We stopped for a meal from the canned stuff in the back of the car about one o'clock and then chugged steadily north through the ruined countryside. The little towns were wrecked and abandoned. Presumably refugees from the expanding Plague Area did the first damage by looting; the subsequent destruction just — happened. It showed you what would just happen to any twentieth-century town or city in the course of a few weeks if the people who wage endless war against breakdown and dilapidation put aside their arms. It was anybody's guess whether fire or water had done more damage.

Between the towns the animals were incredibly bold. There was a veritable army of rabbits eating their way across a field of clover. A farmer-zombie flapped a patchwork quilt at them, saying affectionately: "Shoo, little bunnies! Go away, now! I *mean* it!"

But they knew he didn't, and continued to chew their way across his field.

I stopped the car and called to the farmer. He came right away, smiling. "The little dickenses!" he said, waving at the rabbits. "But I haven't the heart to really scare them."

"Are you happy?" I asked him.

"Oh, yes!" His eyes were sunken and bright; his cheekbones showed on his starved face. "People should be considerate," he said. "I always say that being considerate is what matters most."

"Don't you miss electricity and cars and tractors?"

"Goodness, no. I always say that things were better in the old days. Life was more gracious, I always say. Why, I don't miss gasoline or electricity one little bit. Everybody's so considerate and gracious that it makes up for everything."

"I wonder if you'd be so considerate and gracious as to lie down in the road so we can drive over you?"

He looked mildly surprised and started to get down, saying: "Well, if it would afford you gentlemen any pleasure —"

"No; don't bother after all. You can get back to your rabbits."

He touched his straw hat and went away, beaming. We drove on. I said to the professor: "Chapter Nine: 'How to be in Utter Harmony With Your Environment.' Only she didn't change herself, Professor Leuten; she changed the environment. Every man and woman in the Area is what Miss Phoebe thinks they ought to be: silly, sentimental, obliging and gracious to the point of idiocy. Nostalgic and all thumbs

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when it comes to this dreadful machinery."

"Norris," the professor said thoughtfully, "we've been associated for some time. I think you might drop the 'professor' and call me 'Leuten.' In a way we're friends —"

I jammed on the worn, mushy brakes. "Out!" I yelled, and we piled out. The silly glow was enveloping me fast. Again, thumb to nose and tongue out, I burned it away. When I looked at the professor and was quite sure he was a stubborn old fossil I knew I was all right again. When he glared at me and snapped: "Naturally I withdraw my last remark, Norris, and no chentleman would hold me to it," I knew *he* was normal. We got in and kept going north.

The devastation became noticeably worse after we passed a gutted, stinking shambles that had once been the town of Meshoppen, Pa. After Meshoppen there were more bodies on the road and the flies became a horror. No pyrethrum from Kenya. No DDT from Wilmington. We drove in the afternoon heat with the windows cranked up and the hood ventilator closed. It was at about Meshoppen's radius from La Plume that things had stabilized for a while and the Army Engineers actually began to throw up barbed wire. Who knew what happened then? Perhaps Miss Phoebe recovered from a slight cold, or perhaps she told herself firmly that her faith in Professor Leuten's wonderful book was weakening; that she must take hold of herself and really word *hard* at being in utter harmony with her environment. The next morning — no Army Engineers. Zombies in uniform were glimpsed wandering about and smiling. The next morning the radius of the Plague Area was growing at the old mile a day.

I wanted distraction from the sweat that streamed down my face. "Professor," I said, "do you remember the last word in Miss Phoebe's letter? It was 'forever.' Do you suppose . . . ?"

"Immortality? Yes; I think that is well within the range of misapplied F.E. Of course complete mastery of F.E. ensures that no such selfish power would be invoked. The beauty of F.E. is its conservatism, in the kinetic sense. It is self-regulating. A world in which universal mastery of F.E. has been achieved — and I now perceive that the publication of my views by the Hopedale Press was if anything a step *away* from that ideal — would be in no outward wise different from the present world."

"Built-in escape clause," I snapped. "Like yoga. You ask 'em to prove they've achieved self-mastery, just a little demonstration like levitating or turning transparent, but they're all ready for you. They tell you they've achieved so much self-mastery they've mastered the desire to levitate or turn trans-

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parent. I almost wish I'd read your book, professor, instead of just editing it. Maybe you're smarter than I thought."

He turned brick-red and gritted out: "Your insults merely bore me, Norris."

The highway took a turn and we turned with it. I braked again and rubbed my eyes. "Do you see them?" I asked the professor.

"Yes," he said matter-of-factly. "This must be the retinue of the Duchess of Carbondale."

They were a dozen men shoulder to shoulder barricading the road. They were armed with miscellaneous sporting rifles and one bazooka. They wore kilt-like garments and what seemed to be bracelets from a five-and-ten. When we stopped they opened up the center of the line and the Duchess of Carbondale drove through in her chariot — only the chariot was a harness-racing sulky and she didn't drive it; the horse was led by a skinny teen-age girl got up as Charmian for a high-school production of *Antony and Cleopatra*. The Duchess herself wore ample white robes, a tiara and junk jewelry. She looked like your unfavorite aunt, the fat one, or a grade-school teacher you remember with loathing when you're forty, or one of those women who ring your doorbell and try to bully you into signing petitions against fluoridation or atheism in the public schools.

The bazooka man had his stovepipe trained on our hood. His finger was on the button and he was waiting for the Duchess to nod. "Get out," I told the professor, grabbing my briefcase. He looked at the bazooka and we got out.

"Hail, O mortals," said the Duchess.

I looked helplessly at the professor. Not even my extensive experience with lady novelists had equipped me to deal with the situation. He, however, was able to take the ball. He was a European and he had status and that's the starting point for them: establish status and then conduct yourself accordingly. He said: "Madame, my name is Konrad Leuten. I am a doctor of philosophy of the University of Göttingen and a member of the faculty of the University of Basle. Whom have I the honor to address?"

Her eyes narrowed appraisingly. "O mortal," she said, and her voice was less windily dramatic, "know ye that here in the New Lemuria worldly titles are as naught. And know ye not that the pure hearts of my subjects may not be sullied by base machinery?"

"I didn't know, madame," Leuten said politely. "I apologize. We intended, however, to go only as far as La Plume. May we have your permission to do so?"

At the mention of La Plume she went poker-faced. After a moment she waved at the bazooka man. "Destroy, O Phraxanartes, the base machine of the strangers," she said. Phraxanartes touched the button

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of his stovepipe. Leuten and I jumped for the ditch, my hand welded to the briefcase-handle, when the rocket whooshed into the poor old Ford's motor. We huddled there while the gas tank boomed and cans and bottled exploded. The noise subsided to a crackling roar and the whizzing fragments stopped coming our way after maybe a minute. I put my head up first. The Duchess and her retinue were gone, presumably melted into the roadside stand of trees.

Her windy contralto blasted out: "Arise, O strangers, and join us."

Leuten said from the ditch: "A perfectly reasonable request, Norris. Let us do so. After all, one must be obliging."

"And gracious," I added.

Good old Duchess! I thought. *Good old Leuten! Wonderful old world, with hills and trees and bunnies and kitties and considerate people . . .*

Leuten was standing on one foot, thumbing his nose, sticking out his tongue, screaming: "Norris! Norris! Defend yourself!" He was slapping my face with his free hand. Sluggishly I went into the posture of defense, thinking: *Such nonsense. Defense against what? But I wouldn't hurt old Leuten's feelings for the world —*

Adrenalin boiled through my veins, triggered by the posture. Spiders. Crawling, hairy, horrid spiders with purple, venom-dripping fangs. They hid in your shoes and bit you and your feet swelled with the poison. Their sticky, loathsome webs brushed across your face when you walked in the dark and they came scuttling silently, champing their jaws, winking their evil gem-like eyes. *Spiders!*

The voice of the duchess blared impatiently: "I said, join us, O strangers. Well, what are you waiting for?"

The professor and I relaxed and looked at each other. "She's mad," the professor said softly. "From an asylum."

"I doubt it. You don't know America very well. Maybe you lock them up when they get like that in Europe; over here we elect them chairlady of the Library Fund Drive. If we don't, we never hear the end of it."

The costumed girl was leading the Duchess's sulky onto the road again. Some of her retinue were beginning to follow; she waved them back and dismissed the girl curtly. We skirted the heat of the burning car and approached her. It was that or try to outrun a volley from the miscellaneous sporting rifles.

"O strangers," she said, "you mentioned La Plume. Do you happen to be acquainted with my dear friend Phoebe Bancroft?"

The professor nodded before I could stop him. But almost simultaneously with his nod I was dragging the Duchess from her improvised chariot. It was very unpleasant, but I put my hands around her throat and knelt on her.

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It meant letting go of the briefcase but it was worth it.

She guggled and floundered and managed to whoop: "Don't shoot! I take it back, don't shoot them. Pamphilius, don't shoot, you might hit me!"

"Send 'em away," I told her.

"Never!" she blared. "They are my loyal retainers."

"You try, professor," I said.

I believe what he put on then was his classroom manner. He stiffened and swelled and rasped towards the shrubbery: "Come out at once. All of you."

They came out, shambling and puzzled. They realized that something was very wrong. There was the Duchess on the ground and she wasn't telling them what to do the way she'd been telling them for weeks now. They wanted to oblige her in any little way they could, like shooting strangers, or scrounging canned food for her, but how could they oblige her while she lay there slowly turning purple? It was very confusing. Luckily there was somebody else to oblige, the professor.

"Go away," he barked at them. "Go far away. We do not need you any more. And throw away your guns."

Well, that was something a body could understand. They smiled and threw away their guns and went away in their obliging and considerate fashion.

I eased up on the Duchess's throat.

"What was that guff about the New Lemuria?" I asked her.

"You're a rude and ignorant young man," she snapped. From the corner of my eye I could see the professor involuntarily nodding agreement. "Every educated person knows that the lost wisdom of Lemuria was to be revived in the person of a beautiful priestess this year. According to the science of pyramidology —"

Beautiful priestess? Oh.

The professor and I stood by while she spouted an amazing compost of lost-continentism, the Ten Tribes, anti-fluoridation, vegetarianism, homeopathic medicine, organic farming, astrology, flying saucers, and the prose-poems of Khalil Gibran.

The professor said dubiously at last: "I suppose one must call her a sort of Cultural Diffusionist. . . ." He was happier when he had her classified. He went on: "I think you know Miss Phoebe Bancroft. We wish you to present us to her as soon as possible."

"Professor," I complained, "we have a roadmap and we can find La Plume. And once we've found La Plume I don't think it'll be very hard to find Miss Phoebe."

"I will be pleased to accompany you," said the Duchess. "Though normally I frown on mechanical devices, I keep an automobile nearby in case of — in case of — *well!* Of all the *rude* — !"

Believe it or not, she was speech-

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less. Nothing in her rich store of gibberish and hate seemed to fit the situation. Anti-fluoridation, organic farming, even Khalil Gibran were irrelevant in the face of us two each standing on one leg, thumbing our noses and sticking out our tongues.

Undeniably the posture of defense was losing efficiency. It took longer to burn away the foolish glow. . . .

"Professor," I asked after we warily relaxed, "how many more of those can we take?"

He shrugged. "That is why a guide will be useful," he said. "Madame, I believe you mentioned an automobile."

"I know!" she said brightly. "It was asana yoga, wasn't it? Postures, I mean?"

The professor sucked an invisible lemon. "No, madame," he said cadaverously. "It was neither siddhasana nor padmasana. Yoga has been subsumed under Functional Epistemology, as has every other working philosophical system, Eastern and Western — but we waste time. The automobile?"

"You have to do that every so often; is that it?"

"We will leave it at that, madame. The automobile, please."

"Come right along," she said gaily. I didn't like the look on her face. Madam Chairlady was about to spring a parliamentary coup. But I got my briefcase and followed.

The car was in a nearby barn. It was a handsome new Lincoln, and I was reasonably certain that our fair cicerone had stolen it. But then, we had stolen the Ford.

I loaded the briefcase in and took the wheel over her objections and we headed for La Plume, a dozen miles away. On the road she yelped: "Oh, *Functional* Epistemology — and *you*'re Professor *Leuten!*"

"Yes, madame," he wearily agreed.

"I've read your book, of course. So has Miss Bancroft; she'll be so pleased to see you."

"Then why, madame, did you order your subjects to murder us?"

"Well, professor, of course I didn't know who you were then, and it *was* rather shocking, seeing somebody in a car. I, ah, had the feeling that you were up to no good, especially when you mentioned dear Miss Bancroft. *She*, you know, is really responsible for the re-emergence of the New Lemuria."

"Indeed?" said the professor. "You understand, then, about Leveled Personality Interflow?" He was beaming.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Leveled Personality Interflow!" he barked. "Chapter Nine!"

"Oh. In your book, of course. Well, as a matter of fact I *skipped* —"

"Another one," muttered the professor, leaning back.

The Duchess chattered on: "Dear Miss Bancroft, of course, swears by your book. But you were asking — no, it wasn't what you said. I cast her horoscope and it turned out that *she* is the Twenty-Seventh Pendragon!"

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"*Scheissdreck*," the professor mumbled, too discouraged to translate.

"So naturally, professor, she incarnates Taliesin *spiritually* and" — a modest giggle — "you know who incarnates it *materially*. Which is only sensible, since I'm descended from the high priestesses of Mu. Little did I think when I was running the Wee Occult Book Shoppe in Carbondale!"

"*Ja*," said the professor. He made an effort. "Madame, tell me something. Do you never feel a certain thing, a sense of friendliness and intoxication and good-will enveloping you quite suddenly?"

"Oh, *that*," she said scornfully. "Yes; every now and then. It doesn't bother me. I just think of all the work I have to do. How I must stamp out the dreadful, soul-destroying advocates of meat-eating, and chemical fertilizer, and fluoridation. How I must wage the good fight for occult science and *crush* the materialistic philosophers. How I must tear down our corrupt and self-seeking ministers and priests, our rotten laws and customs —"

"*Lieber Gott*," the professor marveled as she went on. "With Norris it is spiders. With me it is rats and asphyxiation. But with this woman it is apparently everything in the Kosmos except her own revolting self!" She didn't hear him; she was demanding that the voting age for women be lowered to sixteen and for men raised to thirty-five.

We plowed through flies and mosquitoes like smoke. The flies bred happily on dead cows and *in* sheep which unfortunately were still alive. There wasn't oil cake for the cows in the New Lemuria. There wasn't sheep-dip for the sheep. There weren't state and county and township and village road crews constantly patrolling, unplugging sluices, clearing gutters, replacing rusted culverts, and so quite naturally the countryside was reverting to swampland. The mosquitoes loved it.

"La Plume," the Duchess announced gaily. "And that's Miss Phoebe Bancroft's little house right there. Just *why* did you wish to see her, professor, by the way?"

"To complete her re-education . . ." the professor said in a tired voice.

Miss Phoebe's house, and the few near it, were the only places we had seen in the Area which weren't blighted by neglect. Miss Phoebe, of course, was able to tell the shambling zombies what to do in the way of truck-gardening, lawn-mowing and maintenance. The bugs weren't too bad there.

"She's probably resting, poor dear," said the Duchess. I stopped the car and we got out. The Duchess said something about Kleenex and got in again and rummaged through the glove compartment.

"Please, professor," I said, clutching my briefcase. "Play it the smart way. The way I told you."

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"Norris," he said, "I realize that you have my best interests at heart. You're a good boy, Norris and I like you —"

"*Watch it!*" I yelled, and swung into the posture of defense. So did he.

Spiders. It wasn't a good old world, not while there were loathsome spiders in it. *Spiders* —

And a pistol shot past my ear. The professor fell. I turned and saw the Duchess looking smug, about to shoot me too. I sidestepped and she missed; as I slapped the automatic out of her hand I thought confusedly that it was a near-miracle, her hitting the professor at five paces even if he was a standing target. People don't realize how hard it is to hit *anything* with a hand-gun.

I suppose I was going to kill her or at least damage her badly when a new element intruded. A little old white-haired lady tottering down the neat gravel path from the house. She wore a nice pastel dress which surprised me; somehow I had always thought of her in black.

"Bertha!" Miss Phoebe rapped out. "What have you done?"

The Duchess simpered. "That man there was going to harm you, Phoebe, dear. And this fellow is just as bad —"

Miss Phoebe said: "Nonsense. Nobody can harm me. Chapter Nine, Rule Seven. Bertha, I saw you shoot that gentleman. I'm very angry with you, Bertha. Very angry."

The Duchess turned up her eyes and crumpled. I didn't have to check; I was sure she was dead. Miss Phoebe was once again In Utter Harmony With Her Environment.

I went over and knelt beside the professor. He had a hole in his stomach and was still breathing. There wasn't much blood. I sat down and cried. For the professor. For the poor damned human race which at a mile per day would be gobbled up into apathy and idiocy. Goodby, Newton and Einstein, goodby steak dinners and Michelangelo and Tenzing Norkay; goodby Moses, Rodin, Kwan Yin, transistors, Boole and Steichen. . . .

A redheaded man with an adam's apple was saying gently to Miss Phoebe: "It's this rabbit, ma'am." And indeed an enormous rabbit was loping up to him. "Every time I find a turnip or something he takes it away from me and he kicks and bites when I try to reason with him —" And indeed he took a piece of turnip from his pocket and the rabbit insolently pawed it from his hand and nibbled it triumphantly with one wise-guy eye cocked up at his victim. "He does that every time, Miss Phoebe," the man said unhappily.

The little old lady said: "I'll think of something, Henry. But let me take care of these people first."

"Yes, ma'am," Henry said. He reached out cautiously for his piece of turnip and the rabbit bit him and then went back to its nibbling.

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"Young man," Miss Phoebe said to me, "what's wrong? You're giving in to despair. You mustn't do that. Chapter Nine, Rule Three."

I pulled myself together enough to say: "This is Professor Leuten. He's dying."

Her eyes widened. "*The* Professor Leuten?" I nodded. "*How to Live on the Cosmic Expense Account?*" I nodded.

"Oh, dear! If only there were something I could do!"

Heal the dying? Apparently not. She didn't think she could, so she couldn't.

"Professor," I said. "Professor."

He opened his eyes and said something in German, then, hazily: "Woman shot me. Spoil her — racket, you call it? Who is this?" He grimaced with pain.

"I'm Miss Phoebe Bancroft, Professor Leuten," she breathed, leaning over him. "I'm so dreadfully sorry; I admire your wonderful book so much."

His weary eyes turned to me. "So, Norris," he said. "No time to do it right. We do it your way. Help me up."

I helped him to his feet, suffering, I think, almost as much as he did. The wound started to bleed more copiously.

"No!" Miss Phoebe exclaimed. "You should lie down."

The professor leered. "Good idea, baby. You want to keep me company?"

"What's that?" she snapped.

"You heard me, baby. Say, you got any liquor in your place?"

"Certainly not! Alcohol is inimical to the development of the higher functions of the mind. Chapter Nine —"

"Pfui on Chapter Nine, baby. I chust wrote that stuff for money."

If Miss Phoebe hadn't been in a state resembling surgical shock after hearing that, she would have seen the pain convulsing his face. "You mean. . . . ?" she quavered, beginning to look her age for the first time.

"Sure. Lotta garbage. Sling fancy words and make money. What I go for is liquor and women. Women like you, baby."

The goose did it.

Weeping, frightened, insulted and lost she tottered blindly up the neat path to her house. I eased the professor to the ground. He was biting almost through his lower lip.

I heard a new noise behind me. It was Henry, the redhead with the adam's apple. He was chewing his piece of turnip and had hold of the big rabbit by the hind legs. He was flailing it against a tree. Henry looked ferocious, savage, carnivorous and very, very dangerous to meddle with. In a word, human.

"Professor," I breathed at his waxen face, "you've done it. It's broken. Over. No more Plague Area."

He muttered, his eyes closed: "I regret not doing it properly . . . but tell the people how I died,

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Norris. With dignity, without fear. Because of Functional Epistemology."

I said through tears: "I'll do more than tell them, professor. The world will know about your heroism.

The world must know. We've got to make a book of this — your authentic, authorized, fictional biography — and Hopedale's West Coast agent'll see to the film sale —"

"Film?" he said drowsily. "Book. . . ?"

"Yes. Your years of struggle, the little girl at home who kept faith in you when everybody scoffed, your burning mission to transform the world, and the climax — here, now! — as you give up your life for your philosophy."

"What girl?" he asked weakly.

"There must have been someone, professor. We'll find someone."

"You would," he asked feebly, "document my expulsion from Germany by the Nazis?"

"Well, I don't think so, professor. The export market's important, especially when it comes to selling film rights, and you don't want to go offending people by raking up old memories. But don't worry, professor. The big thing is, the world will never forget you and what you've done."

He opened his eyes and breathed: "You mean *your* version of what I've done. Ach, Norris, Norris! Never did I think there was a power on Earth which could force me to contravene The Principle of Permissive Evolution." His voice became stronger. "But you, Norris, are that power." He got to his feet, grunting. "Norris," he said, "I hereby give you formal warning that any attempt to make a fictional biography or cinema film of my life will result in an immediate injunction being — you say slapped? — upon you, as well as suits for damages from libel, copyright infringement and invasion of privacy. I have had *enough*."

"Professor," I gasped. "You're well!"

He grimaced. "I'm sick. Profoundly sick to my stomach at my contravention of the Principle of Permissive —"

His voice grew fainter. This was because he was rising slowly into the air. He leveled off at a hundred feet and called: "Send the royalty statements to my old address in Basle. And remember, Norris, I warned you —"

He zoomed eastward then at perhaps one hundred miles per hour. I think he was picking up speed when he vanished from sight.

I stood there for ten minutes or so and sighed and rubbed my eyes and wondered whether anything was worth while. I decided I'd read the professor's book tomorrow without fail, unless something came up.

Then I took my briefcase and went up the walk and into Miss Phoebe's house. (Henry had made a twig fire on the lawn and was roasting his rabbit; he glared at me most

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disobligingly and I skirted him with care.)

This was, after all, the payoff; this was, after all, the reason why I had risked my life and sanity.

"Miss Phoebe," I said to her taking it out of the briefcase, "I represent the Hopedale Press; this is one of our standard contracts. We're very much interested in publishing the story of your life, with special emphasis on the events of the past few weeks. Naturally you'd have an experienced collaborator. I believe sales in the hundred-thousands wouldn't be too much to expect. I would suggest as a title — that's right, you sign on that line there — *How to be Supreme Ruler of Everybody. . . .*"

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For this our first issue of the new year 1956, Mr. Abernathy contributes a brief tale recommended for reading on New Year's morning . . . and for keeping in mind through this and every year.

The Year 2000

by ROBERT ABERNATHY

NEW YEAR'S MORNING DAWNED crisp and clear. The sun climbed and shone bright, and in answer to its hint of warmth, the city's central heating plant awoke with a hushed roar. Warm tides flowed along every street, melting away the frost that overnight had been allowed to give the air a healthy winter tang.

Outside the chill glass of the bedroom windows, a clatter and chirrup of children with new sleds went past, on their way to the deep-frozen park for sliding and snowmen.

Joseph Bloak pushed open one eye, then another. He thought, fuzzily but not unhappily, that it must have been quite a party last night. It *ought* to have been quite a party — seeing in not only a new year, but a new century and a new millennium. The year 2000!

(Hadn't some drunk kept mournfully insisting that they were jumping the gun, that the millennium didn't officially arrive until January 1, 2001? But the horns and paper hats had drowned him out.)

The cybernetic electric blanket sensed Joe's mood wavering between sloth and will power. Helpfully, it switched itself off and remarked cheerfully, "Time to get up, Joe!"

"*O*-kay," grumbled Joe Bloak. Running his hands over his close-cropped hair (trimmed and lotioned as usual during the night by the automatic barber built into the head of his bed), he padded to the rejuvenator compartment. He pressed the button, and stood motionless for exactly 30 seconds while, with a hushed roar, the electronic scanner sorted out and discarded all the wornout, devitalized molecules in his body, replacing them accurately with fresh molecules from its inexhaustible molecule bank.

A new man, Joe Bloak strode into the breakfast nook just as the toast popped up and his svelte, curvesome wife, wearing a filmy negligee, looked up and greeted him sweetly, "Hi, honey. Want to see the paper?"

"Sure 'nough," grunted Joe, relaxing into a chair which slithered

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hastily into the shape best suited to his spinal curvature. He glanced over the headlines, while the toaster buttered his toast just right and the coffee urn played a muted mambo and poured his cup full of fragrant brew piped steaming from Brazil.

"Looks pretty good," Joe nodded in satisfaction at the morning paper. The banner head frisked blackly across the page: GOV'T ANNOUNCES BALANCED BUDGET! Under the Washington dateline it said that, in view of the country's overpowering prosperity, Congress had just passed legislation repealing all taxes, retroactively and with time and a half for overtime; and that the President had proclaimed the forthcoming consolidation of all administrative agencies in a single Department of Public Euphoria.

Other front-page items stated that SCIENCE FINDS CURE FOR COMMON COLD, that the Air Force had unveiled a new plane which could exceed the speed of rumor, and that Joe Bloak had been promoted to Assistant Manager with a 100% increase in salary.

A last-minute dispatch from Moscow reported that at 3:31 A.M., EST, the Soviet regime had achieved Communism and withered away, exactly as Karl Marx had predicted.

"And oh yes, dear!" exclaimed Joe's wife vivaciously. "The new car just came. It's the new zero zero model."

"Well," said Joe, "let's see it."

The end wall rolled up, and the new '00 model glided in with an awesome glitter and a hushed roar. It was almost as long as a Western movie epic and had more horsepower. Its robotronic transmission possessed a rated IQ of 210 at 4000 RPM and could do the family laundry sparkling-white in detergent foam in exactly thirty seconds. Its optional equipment included thermonuclear tail-lights guaranteed to work under water; solid chrome-plated windshield wrapped twice round and tied in a handsome bow; jet-assisted accelerator pedal; and pushbutton pilot ejector.

"Looks pretty good," admitted Joe slowly. Somehow he was becoming uneasy. Maybe it looked too good.

"Hurry, darling!" cried Joe's constantly more voluptuous wife, efficiently tuning the TV. "We're just in time not to miss *anything!*"

The children filed into the room and sat quietly in a row, all neatly scrubbed and combed by automatic machinery.

The lifesize screen lit up in gorgeous color and portrayed a distinguished gentleman with silvery hair and a deep, heart-warming voice.

"Flash! my friends," throbbed the newscaster, leaning forward from his pulpit with a radiant smile. "Good news! Informed sources state definitely that the Second Coming will take place at 3:31 P.M., Eastern

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Standard Time, on a nationwide hookup. Keep tuned to this station! Yea, verily, my friends, I say unto you, *flash!*"

"Oh, hell," snarled Joe Bloak. "I knew all along I was dreaming."

Still a fresh news bulletin popped frantically up out of the toaster. FLYING SAUCERS LAND ALL OVER! it shouted. *Outer space emissaries notify UN that Planet Earth has been admitted to Galactic Empire with full membership privileges, retroactively and with time and a half for overtime. . . .*

"*Nuts!*" said Joe.

He pushed open one eye, then another. He thought fuzzily that, anyway, it had been quite a dream.

"Time to get up, Joe," rasped his sagging, slattern wife. She squatted by the drafty cave-mouth, poking the smoldering fire. Joe sat up, flinging aside stiffened and shedding animal skins. Smoke made him cough and glower. His wife scratched herself and stolidly poked the fire.

The children shivered by the fire. Joe glanced sourly at them, their vacant looks and all too familiar deformities. That youngest, whose sex they'd never been able to determine, did nothing but slobber. Might as well . . .

"Happy New Year, Joe," his wife said rustily.

"Happy — what?" snarled Joe, running fingers through his frowsy hair. In his head the dream melted, dripped and flowed away into crevices of his brain where coarse shapes of reality couldn't crowd after it. In the darkness there the dream nestled in the company of other past visions, boyhood memories and fancies of long ago, indistinguishable now that the world they belonged to might have been a dream itself. . . . Joe's consciousness was busy resenting the twinges of his rheumatism and the glum knowledge that if they were going to eat today he'd have to tramp through the freezing snow to make the rounds of his rabbit traps.

"Today's another year," said Joe's wife, with a glance at the tally-marks she scratched on the stone wall for no practical reason Joe could see. "It's the year 2000, Joe."

"Ah, go on," said Joe. "Since when?"

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233)
SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION
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In intervals between the serious pursuit of skin-diving and the writing of such masterpieces of fiction and fact as EARTHLIGHT (*Ballantine*, 1955) *and* THE EXPLORATION OF THE MOON (*Harper*, 1955), *Arthur C. Clarke amuses himself by relating the tall tales overheard at the "White Hart" tavern, the Mermaid of the Atomic Age. This is the latest, the tallest, and the funniest of these amazing revelations.*

What Goes Up . . .

by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

ONE OF THE REASONS WHY I AM never too specific about the exact location of the "White Hart" is, frankly, because we want to keep it to ourselves. This is not merely a dog-in-the-manger attitude: we have to do it in pure self-protection. As soon as it gets around that scientists, editors and science fiction writers are foregathering at some locality, the weirdest collection of visitors is likely to turn up. Peculiar people with new theories of the universe, characters who have been "cleared" by Dianetics (God knows what they were like before), intense ladies who are liable to go all clairvoyant after the fourth gin — these are the less exotic specimens. Worst of all, however, are the Flying Saucerers: no cure short of mayhem has yet been discovered for them.

It was a black day when one of the leading exponents of the Flying Saucer religion discovered our hideout and fell upon us with shrill cries of delight. Here, he obviously told himself, was fertile ground for his missionary activities. People who were already interested in space flight, and even wrote books and stories about its imminent achievement, would be a pushover. He opened his little black bag and produced the latest pile of sauceriana.

It was quite a collection. There were some interesting photographs of flying saucers made by an amateur astronomer who lives right beside Greenwich Observatory, and whose busy camera has recorded such a remarkable variety of spaceships, in all shapes and sizes, that one wonders what the professionals next door are doing for their salaries. Then there was a long statement from a gentleman in Texas who had just had a casual chat with the occupants of a saucer making a wayside halt on route to Venus. Lan-

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guage, it seemed, had presented no difficulties: it had taken about ten minutes of arm-waving to get from "Me — Man. This — Earth" to highly esoteric information about the use of the fourth dimension in space travel.

The masterpiece, however, was an excited letter from a character in South Dakota who had actually been offered a lift in a flying saucer, and had been taken for a spin round the Moon. He explained at some length how the saucer travelled by hauling itself along magnetic lines of force, rather like a spider going up its thread.

It was at this point that Harry Purvis rebelled. He had been listening with a professional pride to tales which even he would never have dared to spin, for he was an expert at detecting the yield-point of his audience's credulity. At the mention of lines of magnetic force, however, his scientific training overcame his frank admiration of these latter-day Munchausens, and he gave a snort of disgust.

"That's a lot of nonsense," he said. "I can prove it to you — magnetism's my speciality."

"Last week," said Drew sweetly, as he filled two glasses of ale at once, "you said that crystal structure was your speciality."

Harry gave him a superior smile.

"I'm a *general* specialist," he said loftily. "To get back to where I was before that interruption, the point I want to make is that there's no such thing as a line of magnetic force. It's a mathematical fiction — exactly on a par with lines of longitude or latitude. Now if anyone said they'd invented a machine that worked by pulling itself along parallels of latitude, everybody would know that they were talking drivel. But because few people know much about magnetism, and it sounds rather mysterious, crackpots like this guy in South Dakota can get away with the tripe we've just been hearing."

There's one charming characteristic about the "White Hart" — we may fight among each other, but we show an impressive solidarity in times of crisis. Everyone felt that something had to be done about our unwelcome visitor: for one thing, he was interfering with the serious business of drinking. Fanaticism of any kind casts a gloom over the most festive assembly, and several of the regulars had shown signs of leaving despite the fact that it was still two hours to closing time.

So when Harry Purvis followed up his attack by concocting the most outrageous story that even he had ever presented in the "White Hart," no one interrupted him or tried to expose the weak points in his narrative. We knew that Harry was acting for us all — he was fighting fire with fire, as it were. And we knew that he wasn't expecting us to believe him (if indeed he ever did) so we just sat back and enjoyed ourselves.

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"If you want to know how to propel spaceships," began Harry, "— and mark you, I'm not saying anything one way or the other about the existence of flying saucers — then you must forget magnetism. You must go straight to gravity — that's the basic force of the universe, after all. But it's going to be a tricky force to handle, and if you don't believe me just listen to what happened only last year to a scientist down in Australia. I shouldn't really tell you this, I suppose, because I'm not sure of its security classification, but if there's any trouble I'll swear that I never said a word.

"The Aussies, as you may know, have always been pretty hot on scientific research, and they had one team working on fast reactors — those house-broken atomic bombs which are so much more compact than the old uranium piles. The head of the group was a bright but rather impetuous young nuclear physicist I'll call Dr. Cavor. That, of course, wasn't his real name, but it's a very appropriate one. You'll all recollect, I'm sure, the scientist Cavor in Wells's *First Men in the Moon*, and the wonderful gravity-screening material Cavorite he discovered?

"I'm afraid dear old Wells didn't go into the question of Cavorite very thoroughly. As he put it, it was opaque to gravity just as a sheet of metal is opaque to light. Anything placed above a horizontal sheet of Cavorite, therefore, became weightless and floated up into space.

"Well, it isn't as simple as that. Weight represents energy — an enormous amount of it — which can't just be destroyed without any fuss. You'd have to put a terrific amount of work into even a small object in order to make it weightless. Antigravity screens of the Cavorite type, therefore, are quite impossible — they're in the same class as perpetual motion."

"Three of my friends have made perpetual motion machines," began our unwanted visitor rather stuffily. Harry didn't let him get any further: he just steamed on and ignored the interruption.

"Now our Australian Dr. Cavor wasn't searching for antigravity, or anything like it. In pure science, you can be pretty sure that nothing fundamental is ever discovered by anyone who's actually looking for it — that's half the fun of the game. Dr. Cavor was interested in producing atomic power: what he found was antigravity. And it was quite some time before he realised that was what he'd discovered.

"What happened, I gather, was this. The reactor was of a novel and rather daring design, and there was quite a possibility that it might blow up when the last pieces of fissile material were inserted. So it was assembled by remote control in one of Australia's numerous convenient deserts, all the final operations being observed through TV sets.

"Well, there was no explosion —

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which would have caused a nasty radioactive mess and wasted a lot of money, but wouldn't have damaged anything except a lot of reputations. What actually happened was much more unexpected, and much more difficult to explain.

"When the last piece of enriched uranium was inserted, the control rods pulled out, and the reactor brought up to criticality — everything went dead. The meters in the remote control room, two miles from the reactor, all dropped back to zero. The TV screen went blank. Cavor and his colleagues waited for the bang, but there wasn't one. They looked at each other for a moment with many wild surmises: then, without a word, they climbed up out of the buried control chamber.

"The reactor building was completely unchanged: it sat out there in the desert, a commonplace cube of brick holding a million pounds worth of fissile material and several years of careful design and development. Cavor wasted no time: he grabbed the jeep, switched on a portable Geiger counter, and hurried off to see what had happened.

"He recovered consciousness in hospital a couple of hours later. There was little wrong with him apart from a bad headache, which was nothing to the one his experiment was going to give him during the next few days. It seemed that when he got to within twenty feet of the reactor, his jeep had hit something with a terrific crash. Cavor had got tangled in the steering wheel and had a nice collection of bruises: the Geiger counter, oddly enough, was quite undamaged and was still clucking away quietly to itself, detecting no more than the normal cosmic-ray background.

"Seen from a distance, it had looked a perfectly normal sort of accident, that might have been caused by the jeep going into a rut. But Cavor hadn't been driving all that fast, luckily for him, and anyway there was no rut at the scene of the crash. What the jeep had run into was something quite impossible. It was an invisible wall, apparently the lower rim of a hemispherical dome, which entirely surrounded the reactor. Stones thrown up in the air slid back to the ground along the surface of this dome, and it also extended underground as far as digging could be carried out. It seemed as if the reactor was at the exact centre of in impenetrable, spherical shell.

"Of course, this was marvellous news and Cavor was out of bed in no time, scattering nurses in all directions. He had no idea what had happened, but it was a lot more exciting than the humdrum piece of nuclear engineering that had started the whole business.

"By now you're probably all wondering what the devil a sphere of force — as you science fiction writers would call it — has to do with antigravity. So I'll jump several days and give you the answers that Cavor and his team discovered only

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after much hard work and the consumption of many gallons of that potent Australian beer.

"The reactor, when it had been energised, had somehow produced an antigravity field. All the matter inside a twenty-foot-radius sphere had been made weightless, and the enormous amount of energy needed to do this had been extracted, in some utterly mysterious manner, from the uranium in the pile. Calculations showed that the amount of energy in the reactor was just sufficient to do the job. Presumably the sphere of force would have been larger still if there had been more ergs available in the power-source.

"I can hear someone just waiting to ask a question, so I'll anticipate them. Why didn't this weightless sphere of earth and air float up into space? Well, the earth was held together by its cohesion, anyway, so there was no reason why it should go wandering off. As for the air, that was forced to stay inside the zone of zero-gravity for a most surprising and subtle reason which leads me to the crux of this whole peculiar business.

"Better fasten your seat-belts for the next bit; we've a bumpy passage ahead. Those of you who know something about potential theory won't have any trouble, and I'll do my best to make it as easy as I can for the rest.

"People who talk glibly about antigravity seldom stop to consider its implications, so let's look at a few fundamentals. As I've already said, weight implies energy — lots of it. That energy is entirely due to Earth's gravity field. *If you remove an object's weight*, that's precisely equivalent to taking it clear outside Earth's gravity. And any rocket engineer will tell you how much energy *that* requires."

Harry turned to me and said: "There's an analogy I'd like to borrow from one of your books, Arthur, that puts across the point I'm trying to make. You know — comparing the fight against Earth's gravity to climbing out of a deep pit."

"You're welcome," I said. "I pinched it from Doc Richardson, anyway."

"Oh," replied Harry. "I thought it was too good to be original. Well, here we go. If you hang on to this really very simple idea, you'll be O.K. To take an object clear away from the Earth requires as much work as lifting it *four thousand miles* against the steady drag of normal gravity. Now the matter inside Cavor's zone of force was still on the Earth's surface, but it was weightless. From the energy point of view, therefore, it was outside the Earth's gravity field. It was as inaccessible as if it was on top of a four-thousand-mile-high mountain.

"Cavor could stand outside the antigravity zone and look into it from a point a few inches away. To cross those few inches, he would have to do as much work as if he climbed Everest seven hundred times. It wasn't surprising that the

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jeep stopped in a hurry. No material object had stopped it, but from the point of view of dynamics it had run smack into a cliff four thousand miles high. . . .

"I can see some blank looks that are not entirely due to the lateness of the hour. Never mind: if you don't get all this, just take my word for it. It won't spoil your appreciation of what follows — at least, I hope not.

"Cavor had realised at once that he had made one of the most important discoveries of the age, though it was some time before he worked out just what was going on. The final clue to the antigravitational nature of the field came when they shot a rifle bullet into it and observed the trajectory with a high-speed camera. Ingenious, don't you think?

"The next problem was to experiment with the field's generator and to find just what had happened inside the reactor when it had been switched on. This was a problem indeed. The reactor was there in plain sight, twenty feet away. But to reach it would require slightly more energy than going to the Moon. . . .

"Cavor was not disheartened by this, nor by the inexplicable failure of the reactor to respond to any of its remote controls. He theorised that it had been completely drained of energy, if one can use a rather misleading term, and that little if any power was needed to maintain the antigravity field once it had been set up. This was one of the many things that could only be determined by examination on the spot. So by hook or by crook, Dr. Cavor would have to go there.

"His first idea was to use an electrically-driven trolley, supplied with power through cables which it dragged behind it as it advanced into the field. A hundred horsepower generator, running continuously for seventeen hours, would supply enough energy to take a man of average weight on the perilous twenty-foot journey. A velocity of slightly over a foot an hour did not seem much to boast about, until you remembered that advancing one foot into the antigravity field was equivalent to a two-hundred-mile vertical climb.

"The theory was sound, but in practice the electric trolley wouldn't work. It started to push its way into the field, but began to skid after it had traversed half an inch. The reason was obvious when one started to think about it. Though the power was there, the traction wasn't. No wheeled vehicle could climb a gradient of two hundred miles per foot.

"This minor setback did not discourage Dr. Cavor. The answer, he realised at once, was to produce the traction at a point outside the field. When you wanted to lift a load vertically, you didn't use a cart: you used a jack or an hydraulic ram.

"The result of this argument was one of the oddest vehicles ever built. A small but comfortable cage, con-

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taining sufficient provisions to last a man for several days, was mounted at the end of a twenty-foot-long horizontal girder. The whole device was supported off the ground by balloon tyres, and the theory was that the cage could be pushed right into the centre of the field by a machine which would remain outside its influence. After some thought, it was decided that the best prime-mover would be the common or garden bulldozer.

"A test was made with some rabbits in the passenger compartment — and I can't help thinking that there was an interesting psychological point here. The experimenters were trying to get it both ways: as scientists they'd be pleased if their subjects got back alive, and as Australians they'd be just as happy if they got back dead. But perhaps I'm being a little too fanciful. . . . (You know, of course, how Australians feel about rabbits.)

"The bulldozer chugged away hour after hour, forcing the weight of the girder and its insignificant payload up the enormous gradient. It was an uncanny sight — all this energy being expended to move a couple of rabbits twenty feet across a perfectly horizontal plain. The subjects of the experiment could be observed throughout the operation: they seemed to be perfectly happy and quite unaware of their historic rôle.

"The passenger compartment reached the centre of the field, was held there for an hour, and then the girder was slowly backed out again. The rabbits were alive, in good health, and to nobody's particular surprise there were now six of them.

"Dr. Cavor, naturally, insisted on being the first human being to venture into a zero-gravity field. He loaded up the compartment with torsion balances, radiation detectors, and periscopes so that he could look into the reactor when he finally got to it. Then he gave the signal, the bulldozer started chugging, and the strange journey began.

"There was, naturally, telephone communication from the passenger compartment to the outside world. Ordinary sound waves couldn't cross the barrier, for reasons which were still a little obscure, but radio and telephone both worked without difficulty. Cavor kept up a running commentary as he was edged forward into the field, describing his own reactions and relaying instrument readings to his colleagues.

"The first thing that happened to him, though he had expected it, was nevertheless rather unsettling. During the first few inches of his advance, as he moved through the fringe of the field, the direction of the vertical seemed to swing around. 'Up' was no longer towards the sky: it was now in the direction of the reactor hut. To Cavor, it felt as if he was being pushed up the face of a vertical cliff, with the reactor twenty feet above him. For the first time, his eyes and his ordinary hu-

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man senses told him the same story as his scientific training. He could *see* that the centre of the field was, gravity-wise, higher than the place from which he had come. However, imagination still boggled at the thought of all the energy it would need to climb that innocent-looking twenty feet, and the hundreds of gallons of diesel oil that must be burned to get him there.

"There was nothing else of interest to report on the journey itself, and at last, twenty hours after he had started, Cavor arrived at his destination. The wall of the reactor hut was right beside him, though to him it seemed not a wall but an unsupported floor sticking out at right angles from the cliff up which he had risen. The entrance was just above his head, like a trapdoor through which he would have to climb. This would present no great difficulty, for Dr. Cavor was an energetic young man, extremely eager to find just how he had created this miracle.

"Slightly too eager, in fact. For as he tried to work his way into the door, he slipped and fell off the platform that had carried him there.

"That was the last that anyone ever saw of him — but it wasn't the last they heard of him. Oh dear no! He made a very big noise indeed. . . .

"You'll see why when you consider the situation in which this unfortunate scientist now found himself. Hundreds of kilowatt-hours of energy had been pushed into him — enough to lift him to the Moon and beyond. All that work had been needed to take him to a point of zero gravitational potential. As soon as he lost his means of support, that energy began to reappear. To get back to our earlier and very picturesque analogy — the poor doctor had slipped off the edge of the four-thousand-mile-high mountain he had ascended.

"He fell back the twenty feet that had taken almost a day to climb. 'Ah, what a fall was there, my countrymen!' It was precisely equivalent, in terms of energy, to a free drop from the remotest stars down to the surface of the Earth. And you all know how much velocity an object acquires in *that* fall. It's the same velocity that's needed to get it there in the first place — the famous velocity of escape. Seven miles a second, or twenty-five thousand miles an hour.

"That's what Dr. Cavor was doing by the time he got back to his starting point. Or to be more accurate, that's the speed he involuntarily tried to reach. As soon as he passed Mach 1 or 2, however, air resistance began to have its little say. Dr. Cavor's funeral pyre was the finest, and indeed the only, meteor display ever to take place entirely at sea level. . . .

"I'm sorry that this story hasn't got a happy ending. In fact, it hasn't really got an ending at all, because that sphere of zero gravitational po-

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tential is still sitting there in the Australian desert, apparently doing nothing at all but in fact producing ever-increasing amounts of frustration in scientific and official circles. I don't see *how* the authorities can hope to keep it secret much longer. Sometimes I think how odd it is that the world's tallest mountain is in Australia — and that though it's four thousand miles high the airliners often fly right over it without knowing it's there."

You will hardly be surprised to hear that H. Purvis finished his narration at this point: even he could hardly take it much further, and no-one wanted him to. We were all, including his most tenacious critics, lost in admiring awe. I have since detected six fallacies of a fundamental nature in his description of Dr. Cavor's Frankensteinian fate, but at the time they never even occurred to me. (And I don't propose to reveal them now. They will be left, as the mathematics textbooks put it, as an exercise for the reader.) What had earned our undying gratitude, however, was the fact that at some slight sacrifice of truth he had managed to keep Flying Saucers from invading the White Hart. It was almost closing time, and too late for our visitor to make a counter-attack.

That is why the sequel seems a little unfair. A month later, someone brought a very odd publication to one of our meetings. It was nicely printed and laid out with professional skill, the misuse of which was sad to behold. The thing was called *Flying Saucer Revelations* — and there on the front page was a full and detailed account of the story Purvis had told us. It was printed absolutely straight — and what was much worse than that, from poor Harry's point of view, was that it was attributed to him by name.

Since then he has had 4,375 letters on the subject, most of them from California. 24 called him a liar; 4,205 believed him absolutely. (The remaining ones he couldn't decipher and their contents still remain a matter for speculation.)

I'm afraid he's never quite got over it, and I sometimes think he's going to spend the rest of his life trying to stop people believing the one story he never expected to be taken seriously.

There may be a moral here. For the life of me I can't find it.

Note:

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There is only one trouble with P. Schuyler Miller's otherwise admirable department of book reviews in Astounding: *ever since Mr. Miller became one of s.f.'s leading reviewers, he has all but vanished as a writer. This is all wrong; the man who could in the past create such a classic of time travel as* As Never Was *or such a definitive story of vampirism as* Over the River *should be firmly in the lead of today's writers. I am still hopefully trying to coax a new story out of Miller, and meanwhile I take pleasure in reviving this little-known fantasy of some six years ago, one of the last Miller stories before the Sad Hiatus — a softspoken and underplayed tale which may remind you of the comparably polished work of H. Russell Wakefield.*

Daydream

by P. SCHUYLER MILLER

AT PRECISELY HALF PAST 9 OF A bright May morning, Mr. Murgatroyd Montmorency Mudge opened the door of his trim white cottage at 37 Beneway Lane, and stood for a moment enjoying the sunshine as he drew on his small gray gloves.

He was an elderly gentleman, was Mr. Mudge, and inclined to be stout, with a complexion as pink and soft as a baby's and crisp white hair which curled a little over the ears. He wore a neat black frock-coat, striped gray trousers, a fresh wing-collar, and a mauve Ascot tie impaled by a large black baroque pearl stickpin. His boots were freshly polished and his pearl-gray spats were immaculate as always. A heavy gold watch-chain arced across the convexity of his faintly patterned waistcoat, with a large carnelian scarab as a charm. He set his prim black bowler carefully on his head, tucked his cane with its chased gold head under his arm, and began to work his plump fingers into the left-hand glove.

There were clumps of violets in the grass beside the line of scrubbed flags which led from Mr. Mudge's doorstep to his gate. Later there would be a border of forget-me-nots, and in the fall small russet and gold chrysanthemums. A bee swung lazily across the lawn, and his bright blue eyes swung after it, for Mr. Mudge had something of a reputa-

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tion as a beekeeper and gardener among the good people of Beneway Lane.

As he did each morning at precisely the same time, Mr. Mudge turned and reopened his front door. He was joined on the doorstep by a large brindled cat, who looked about him appraisingly, saw nothing of particular interest, and sat down to wash his face. Every morning Mr. Mudge surveyed the premises for hostile dogs and small boys before he permitted Erasmus to follow him outside, and every morning Erasmus waited tolerantly until his little game was done with, although there was no cat within miles of Beneway Lane who had more completely earned the respect of small boys and dogs.

At precisely 10 o'clock, if all went well, Mr. Mudge would unlock the door of his bookshop on Halfmoon Street, run up the shades in the narrow windows, and begin another day. It was quite probable, however, that prior to that time he would have been set upon by footpads, threatened by masked assassins, forced to rescue a dark maiden from villainous Orientals, or drawn into conversation by an inquisitive resident of the planet Mars.

At the time of which we speak now, it would have been very difficult to say with any degree of certainty what portion of Mr. Mudge's person and personality was the creation of James Payson, and what part had been contributed by his cousin Charles. James had been his originator, but at that time his name had not been Mudge, he had neither cat nor cane, and his whole approach to life was very very different.

James Payson invented Murgatroyd Montmorency during the three weeks after his mother died, and before he was adopted by his Uncle Phillip. James had no memories of his father, but the awkward little figure he laboriously drew on a sheet of old note-paper and cut out with the kitchen shears bore a vague resemblance to the crayon portrait over the parlor mantle. It was much more like the slim and dashing heroes with glossy sideburns and silk-lined cloaks who strode through the pages of the Victorian romances on the bottom shelf of the parlor bookcase. James' mother had had a weakness for such things, and in one of them the lonely boy found a name with precisely the swash and swagger he wanted for his paper hero — Mr. Murgatroyd Montmorency.

During his weeks alone in the empty house with only the cook, a well-meaning but ignorant old woman, for mentor and companion, James became very deft in his delineation of Murgatroyd Montmorency. He had a talent for drawing and a vivid imagination, and together the two — the seven-year-old boy and the paper man — embarked on a series of altogether remarkable adventures. If worst came to worst, and Murgatroyd should be consumed by fire or flood, he could al-

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ways be recreated from another piece of paper, and each time he was reborn he gained somehow in strength and reality in the lonely child's imagination.

When James was adopted by his mother's elder brother, Phillip Galt, and taken to live with his Aunt Gracie and his Cousin Charles in the city, he had no friend in all the world but Murgatroyd Montmorency. Murgatroyd went with him in the one valise he was permitted to take with him from his old home; he was discovered there by Aunt Gracie, who had no patience with little boys who played with dolls, and consigned at once to the flames of the nursery fireplace, from which a fortnight later, when James had discovered where the scissors and paper were kept, he arose like the phoenix and went his adventurous way as of old.

It was not to be for long. Charles Galt was a large boy, stout for his age and slippery in his dealings with his elders. Since there were no other children in the immediate neighborhood, he had been rather hard put to find scapegoats until James appeared. The retiring child filled the need admirably, but it was a source of considerable irritation to Charles to find that his cousin seemed to have some secret source of energy and consolation on which to draw after a day of sheer misery.

The boys had separate rooms, but there was a closet between with a screwed-up door opening into James' room. After some thought and a little experiment, Charles was able to remove the screws, saw off the larger portion of the thread, and replace the heads so that the door seemed as tightly sealed as ever, though in reality it was not. Pushing it a little ajar, he was able to watch all that went on after his cousin had been sent to bed, and discovered Murgatroyd Montmorency.

His first reaction was much the same as his mother's. Boys who played with paper dolls were even fairer game for torment than the common run of poor relations. Then, while he was still turning over in his mind the various possibilities for capitalizing on his knowledge, he discovered that James' dolls were not at all the common sort. They were, in fact, little paper men and women, active and alert, with very distinct personalities of their own, who acted out dramas every bit as exciting as anything Charles had found in paper novels or in the as yet novel cinema, which he occasionally visited with his parents. He promptly and forcibly declared himself a partner in James's play. Shortly afterward the dashing Mr. Murgatroyd Montmorency became plump, pink-cheeked, bumbling Mr. Murgatroyd Montmorency Mudge.

Once he had decided that participation in James' games had more to offer than blackmail, Charles assumed leadership of the whole enterprise. He chose the characters of each night's play, he planned their

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adventures, and he invariably selected the villains of the piece as his own particular charges. From the beginning Murgatroyd was James's. He soon found that there was no altering that, and the obvious solution was to alter Murgatroyd. From the hero of each adventure he became a foil, the struggling, fumbling, hopelessly outnumbered and outmaneuvered victim of whatever deviltry Charles could plot against him. He grew old and stout and drab, and as a crowning insult he was given the most grubbing and prosaic name that Charles could find. Thus Montmorency became Mudge.

James was shy and more than a little afraid of his bullying cousin, but Murgatroyd had become somehow a part of him, and he used all the skill and craft of which his fertile mind was capable to circumvent the degradation which Charles had brought upon his paper hero. He drew the little man with loving care, as we have seen him, and created Erasmus — a very formidable individual in his own right — as his companion. The brindled cat on more than one occasion carried secret messages, summoned the police, or attacked vicious and enormous dogs, tigers, and other beasts to their usual confusion. Mr. Mudge suffered exceedingly under Charles' machinations, but he had a way of slipping out of the wiliest traps by what seemed to be sheer bumbling good fortune, which often led to tears and blows, and sent him flying into the fire or the waste-basket. He would always rise from the dead, as good as ever, in time for the next day's play.

This sort of thing went on for more than three years, while James reached and passed the critical age of ten, and Charles grew to a burly and bullying thirteen. Oddly enough, though he had other interests which worried his parents no little, he had not lost his fascination in their game of paper dolls. His taste for spilled blood and violent action did not dwindle with the years, and James found it more and more difficult to bring his portly hero out of the game intact and in his right mind. However, it would in no way have suited Charles' purpose for Mudge to "die" and end their game, for he derived real satisfaction from the vicarious violence and sadistic pleasantries in which he could indulge through the paper characters of their adventures.

Phillip Galt was a publisher of religious works and slim volumes of verse by country poets who could afford to assist with the propagation of their genius. The business was to be Charles's some day, but he saw no reason to bother the boy with it until the time came for him to assume command. James was another matter entirely. The printers were instructed to find work for him, which would save the firm the expense of another man. He worked before and after school and on all days when school was not in session, and it was understood that when he reached the age of twelve he might

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look forward to full employment. He had his duties in the household, too, and if the game of dolls had not brought him escape into a dream world of true release, the nightly struggles with Charles and his paper ruffians might have turned into a thing to fear and dread.

James was a quiet boy. He had had no friends during the years he lived alone in the country with his mother, and he had none now. But he was an intelligent boy as well, with a knack of getting at the roots of other persons' characters and seeing what made them tick. Little by little he added to Mr. Mudge certain not too obvious traits which did much to sustain him when the inevitable onslaught came. Charles found his plots going sour with distressing frequency, and he had fits of losing interest in the game and leaving it for a day or two, or as much as a week. On such occasions James would sit at his bedside table, drawing and redrawing the portly figure of Mr. Mudge.

There came a morning when James did not appear with the breakfast tray at the usual time. His aunt went to investigate, and found his room empty, his battered satchel gone, and with it the contents of the vase in which she kept whatever money she was able to hold out of the household expenses for uses of her own. A hue and cry was raised at once, but nobody had ever bothered to have the child photographed, and there was really nothing at all distinctive about his person or his clothes. It might have been easier for the police to trace Mr. Murgatroyd Montmorency Mudge, but only Charles had ever heard of him, and he was doing his best to keep out of the limelight because of certain things which had happened on the night in question.

James's aunt was no more anxious to admit to her husband that she had been dipping into her house money. The police went through the usual motions, time went on its way, and eventually James Payson was consigned to good riddance.

When in due time Charles Galt inherited his father's business, he found that religious publishing was not quite the bottomless well it had been, and that country poets were becoming more demanding and distinctly less pecunious. Charles, by that time, was in his late twenties and had made contacts to whom a publishing house might have its uses. Until the police learned what those uses were, and took a severe view of the matter, Charles lived very well. The friends to whom he had been useful were grateful in their fashion, but he was not particularly clever, and soon found himself out of his depth again. It was then that he began to travel. As the years went by he grew burlier and flashier, with a kind of crude *savoir faire* which went a long way in some rather fashionable circles.

It was at a rather arty cocktail party that Charles at last encoun-

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tered his Cousin James. He had been brought there by a sculptor who found him amusing, and was doing his best to keep the impression alive with extravagant and off-color anecdotes in bad French, when he saw James talking to their hostess. He had changed much less than Charles. He was still very thin, still sharp-faced and rather hungry-looking, with horn-rimmed glasses on his pointed nose. He was also quietly and very well dressed by a tailor who knew his business and charged accordingly.

Before Charles could break off his story and elbow through the press, James had gone. He wandered back to the group he had left, who were rather hoping that he was gone for good.

"Who was that chap with the specs?" he demanded. "Skrim-shank sort of bloke who's going bald? Seems to me I knew him once."

"You mean the man who's just gone out? That's James Payson — the publisher. Maude was wild to get him, and she'll be furious that he's just looked in and gone again. He's made himself a mint out of *Fashion*."

Charles recalled *Fashion* vaguely and he checked on his memory at the earliest convenience. It had been a sleazy, ill-printed imitation of the smart women's magazines, which had suddenly caught on and seemed on its way to becoming all things to all people. Its stories and articles were now by the most fashionable authors — its art work was done by the most fashionable designers and painters of the day — and it published eviscerating "cross-sections" of men and women who were or would be in the forefront of the news. It had its own stylists for men and women, its own annual dramatic award, and its own monthly book selection, which rarely agreed with those of the big book clubs but was fast coming to carry as much weight as theirs. It was something of a shock to Charles Galt to discover that the man behind this obvious gold mine was his runaway Cousin James.

James Payson was at his desk going over the layout of their next issue when his cousin was announced. His first reaction was a feeling of apprehension — something of the old inward cringing whenever Charles would appear. His next was curiosity, for it was nearly thirty years since he had slipped out of the Galt house with his battered old satchel and his aunt's little hoard.

Charles was leaning familiarly on the railing in the outer office, flashing a large gold incisor at James' pretty secretary. Nice little bit of stuff, he had decided. On the lean side, but a matchstick burned just as hot as a candle once you'd lit it. Had an eye for the boss, too, he told himself as James' door opened and the girl turned quickly to him.

James, on his part, found himself trying to see the hulking brute of a boy behind the features of this crudely turned out, red-faced man.

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It was Charles — no question. He asked the girl to cancel his other appointments for the afternoon, and ushered Charles into his office.

Charles Galt was a shrewd appraiser of appearances. What he had seen of the offices and their staff looked expensive. James dealt with an expensive crowd, and he had clearly lifted himself into their class. He was on top, but as Charles well knew the top is just one fall from the bottom.

He emptied the last of James's excellent whiskey down his throat and leaned back in his chair, lighting one of James's cigars. "Jimmy," he said condescendingly, "you've got a nice thing here. I'm glad you're going to be my partner."

James studied him. This was what the little chill had meant when Miss Graves sent in Charles' name. "I don't need a partner," he replied quietly.

"It takes experience to make a go of a thing like this," his cousin told him. "You've had beginner's luck, but it'll be just a flash in the pan unless somebody with experience and contacts steps in and puts a solid foundation under it. Take me, now — I was in the publishing business for years before you were ever heard of. I know people. I've been all over the world. It'll be the making of your book to have me help you out."

James was a little pale. He didn't like trouble. He took off his glasses and slipped them into the drawer of his desk. "Let's have it," he said wearily. "Why am I going to give you a share of what I've spent my life to put together? It won't be for cousinly love, I assure you!"

The smile went off Charles's red face as he flung his cigar down and leaned forward over the desk. "I'll tell you why you're cutting me in here," he snarled. "It's because you're a thief. A damned, sniveling, *petty* thief — the kind who steals pennies out of the savings of the old woman who took him in and brought him up in her own home like a son. It's all in the police record. It'll make a very nice story in circles I know. If you'd slit your wife's throat or swindled a few thousand poor stockholders it might be a different story — but there's a funny thing about the kind of company you've been keeping lately. They don't like petty stuff. It makes them look petty themselves, if it comes out that they've been sucking up to a piker."

"I thought it might be that," James replied. "I've been into it all with our attorneys — long ago. You see, there was a matter of a legacy from my mother which Uncle Phillip took over at the time he took me. He put it into his business, but there was never any accounting of what was his and what was rightfully mine. I borrowed a little of that money when I ran away. You might say I invested it in this business. You had the rest, Charles — but I've never asked what happened to it. I

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will — in court — if you try to make trouble. It'll be tit for tat, Charles — and you're dead wrong if you think you can wreck *Fashion* or me with some petty scandal."

Galt lumbered to his feet. "You'd try that, eh? Tit for tat? Let's get right down to simple things then. I've got two good fists here, and I've got friends outside. I can make your face into something that'll make that pretty little girl out there sick to her stomach when she looks at you. Maybe you can have me sent up for it — if you do business that way — but I've got good friends who'll be glad to stop around now and again and freshen up the job for me when you get it fixed again. There's my last offer, Jimmy boy — take it or leave it."

James slid his chair back and slipped around the desk, keeping it between himself and Galt, "You can't bully me with your threats," he cried. "Get out, now, or I'll call the police."

"Police, is it?" Galt jeered. "You were always the sniveling sissy with your paper dolls and your fairy tales. Why don't you have a bodyguard? Maybe your old pal Mudge'll be glad to come to the rescue. Remember him — old paper-belly Mudge? Why don't you ask him to throw me out?"

"James — did I hear you call?" Mr. Murgatroyd Montmorency Mudge opened the door from the outer hall and stepped into the office. His coat was buttoned neatly over his figured vest. He was wearing his gloves and a neat black bowler, and carrying his gold-headed cane. Erasmus strutted after him, tail stiffly in air.

Charles Galt stared at the little man belligerently. "Who is this guy?" he demanded. "You trying to be funny?"

"Why, it's Charles!" Mr. Mudge exclaimed happily. "How you have grown, Charles. You're getting fat, you know — positively pudgy, like me." He giggled. "We must watch our diet when we're our age, Charles."

"Get this old fool out of here!" Charles ordered. "I've got business with Payson now — so make yourself scarce. You can have him when I'm done — if you want him!"

James Payson had dropped down in his chair and was gaping at the familiar figure. He tried to speak and couldn't. Mr. Mudge answered for him. "I'll handle this, James," he said primly. "I have never liked Charles. Even as a child he was cruel and stupid. It will give me very definite satisfaction to show him out."

"You!" Galt came across the room like a charging bull. With a giggle the little man stepped lightly out of his way. One trim foot went out and Charles plowed into the carpet on his face. As he pushed himself to his feet, Mr. Mudge stepped out into the middle of the floor. He stripped his gloves off quickly, dropped them into his hat, and deposited it on James' desk. The cat jumped up and

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settled down beside it to watch the proceedings.

"Respect, Charles," the little man warned, "— respect! I have never liked your attitude toward me, Charles."

There was a smear of blood on Charles Galt's nose and his collar had come loose from the stud. He stood like a dancing bear, swaying a little and glaring at the others. "Making out I'm nuts, are you? Trying to make me think you're a goddamn paper doll? I'll tear you up like I used to and ram you down this lily-livered weakling's gullet before I'm through with you!" He sidled across the carpet like a wrestler, eying the little man. Erasmus, who had cocked a leg up, peered out from under it with sudden interest.

Mr. Mudge stood waiting, peering benevolently over his gold-rimmed spectacles. As Galt lunged at him, his hand shot out and clipped the younger man neatly behind the ear. Charles went down with a thud on his knees, shaking his head savagely.

"Science, Charles — you lack science!" Mr. Mudge chided. "Brute force is always at a disadvantage before skill and balance. Have you been in Japan, Charles?"

When Galt came to his feet again it was with a rush which carried him across the room. Mr. Mudge stepped back and his small black boot with its gray spat shot up in the neatest of *savates*. Charles went down again and lay there panting.

"You can teach an old dog new tricks, Charles," Mr. Mudge told him. "You taught me a great many yourself as a boy — and James has been most generous in the last thirty years. We have often enjoyed ourselves, he and I."

Mr. Mudge was still holding his cane, slanting across his body as a fencer holds a foil. His eyes were gleaming. They hardened and brightened as Charles Galt got slowly to his feet for the last time. Blood was smeared across his face and his lips were drawn back in a savage grimace of hate. He had taken a knife from his pocket and was opening the blade.

As he saw the knife, James suddenly found his voice. With a shout of warning he sprang to the old man's rescue. He was too late.

As Galt closed in, the cane licked out like an *épée*. The loaded ferrule clicked against Charles' gold tooth and there was a black space where the tooth had been. It whipped downward, and the knife went spinning across the room. Then Charles was groping for the door, his arms shielding his face, while Mr. Murgatroyd Montmorency Mudge went skipping after him, laying on with a vim and vigor ill-suited to his years and figure, giggling happily at every stroke.

Helen Graves, James Payson's private secretary, has never been quite clear about what she saw in her employer's office. She had disliked and distrusted Charles Galt from the moment she set eyes on him. When he was well inside, she locked the

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outer office door to prevent interruption, opened the door to the private office a crack, and listened. Later she opened it wide enough to see a little.

She saw James grow whiter and whiter and his mouth thinner and thinner as the interview proceeded. She heard Charles Galt's sneering threat, and the name of Mudge. Then there was confusion.

She thought that James rose from his chair and met Galt's charge squarely, laughing a little. She thought that James seemed to be everywhere at once, attacking Charles from two directions, mocking him in an odd high-pitched voice — and that a huge brindled cat had appeared from nowhere and sat on top of the desk, watching the struggle with satisfaction.

Later Miss Graves discovered that there were cat-hairs on the carpet and on James's coat. That might have puzzled her had she not at the time been concerned with other things.

As for James Payson, he spent less time in daydreaming, staring into thin air and toying with the paper figure of a portly little man, round-faced and beaming, who carried a cane in one gloved hand. He too was concerned with other and more tangible things.

And who can say that Mr. Murgatroyd Montmorency Mudge may not have been glad to retire at last to the little white cottage at 37 Beneway Lane, to potter around with his bees and flowers and write learned letters to the journals about his books and scarabs, while Erasmus dozed away the years beside him in the warm sunlight of eternal spring?

The Anti-climax

Surviving the bomb and the alien planes,
The mammals were exterminated.
Etymological history explains
The plots of the emmets who overran Man.
From atom and evil,
Through arts mediaeval,
Tiny tenants of planets their limits advance
To ethical puberty.
Man lost the shrubbery, determinated,
And fated to perish of ants in the plants.

WINONA McCLINTIC

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Until last year, Dr. Robert Lindner was chiefly known, at least in literary circles, as the author of REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE *(Grune & Stratton, 1944), an extraordinary and profound study of the hypnoanalysis of a criminal psychopath which has become almost a bible to such psychological-crime writers as John Ross Macdonald and Margaret Millar (and which is shortly to be made — heaven know how! — into a film). But the even more extraordinary narratives — extraordinary both as case-histories and as artistic works — contained in his* THE FIFTY-MINUTE HOUR *(Rinehart, 1955) have established Dr. Lindner as the master-creator of a new literary genre: the psychoanalytical tale, fusing the fascination of truth with the suspense and insight of fiction. Of all these tales, the most curious is that which we bring you here (in much more detailed form, particularly in its episodes of science-fictional interest, than its previous magazine appearance): the true, yet all but incredible, story of an atomic scientist who believed himself capable of travel through all dimensions of time and space . . . and of an analyst who came to share the belief. Dr. Lindner, himself a somewhat reluctant enthusiast of s.f. (and what unrecognized inhibitions cause that reluctance?), has here produced, to my taste, one of the factual classics of the field, more intricately absorbing than even the best imaginative psychological fiction of the Kuttners.*

The Jet-Propelled Couch

by ROBERT LINDNER

"No sound was there in that high presence chamber in Galing till in a minute's space the serving man returned with startled countenance, and, bowing before Lord Juss, said, 'Lord, it is an Ambassador from Witchland and his train. He craveth present audience.'"

— E. R. EDDISON, "The Worm Ouroboros."

THE CHAIR BEHIND THE COUCH IS not the stationary object it seems. I have traveled all over the world on it, and back and forth in time. Without moving from my easy seat I have met important personages and witnessed great events. But it remained for Kirk Allen to take me out of this world when he transformed the couch in my consulting room into

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a space ship that roved the galaxies.

My tale begins on a sultry June morning in Baltimore with a telephone call from a physician at a government installation in the Southwest.

"The fellow I'm calling you about," he said, "is a man in his thirties, a research physicist with us out here. As far as I can tell, he's perfectly normal in every way except for a lot of crazy ideas about living part of the time in another world — on another planet. Maybe this isn't so bad, but the trouble is he's really 'gone' so much — if you know what I mean — that his efficiency is way below par and the operation here is suffering because of it. As I say, he's a physicist. Washington sent him out to do a key job, and until a few weeks ago he was going great guns. But lately he's out of contact with the work so much and for so long that something's got to be done about it."

"How did you find out about his ideas?" I asked. "Did he complain to you — or what?"

"No," the doctor replied, "Allen — the patient's name is Kirk Allen — never said a thing about it. To him it's all perfectly natural. Of course, he's sorry about the drop in departmental efficiency. Apologizes all over the place and promises to do better. Says — get this! — says he'll *try to spend more time on this planet!*"

"And how did he get to you?" I persisted.

"Well, Allen's a section chief and the biggest part of his job is to evaluate and correlate reports of the research people under him and then send on digests of his section's work to the divisional head. His digests kept coming in later and later, and when they did get to the division head, Bagby — that's the division chief — not only noticed they were below standard for Allen, but some of them were incoherent and a few of the papers were covered with funny symbols or . . . pictographs, I guess you'd call them. . . ."

"— So Bagby called him in?"

"Yes. He called him in and asked for an explanation."

"And what did Allen say?"

"Well, he really didn't say much of anything the first time. Just that he'd been away a lot lately and that he'd try to spend more time here from now on."

"Had he been away?" I asked.

"No. You see, it's really as hard to get out of here as to come in. Allen couldn't leave without all sorts of security red tape and Bagby knew he hadn't been off the premises for months and months. But then Bagby thought maybe Allen meant he'd been ill in his quarters or something. Well, Bagby checked, but the records showed that Allen hadn't missed a day.

"Well, the whole thing hung fire for a few days — until the next batch of reports came in late again and covered over with the same kind of . . . doodling. So Bagby had another session with Allen."

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"What happened this time?" I pressed.

"Well, the outcome of it was that Bagby sent Allen over to me. Seems that all he could get out of the boy was a lot of regretful apologies. Then Allen made this crazy statement about spending more time on this planet. He told Bagby it might be hard to arrange, but he'd do it somehow."

"Did Bagby ask about the doodling on the reports?"

"Oh, yes," the doctor said. "Seems all Allen had to say was that those symbols were notes he intended to transcribe into his diaries. Said he never got around to it and wanted Bagby to give the reports back so he could catch up with his back entries!"

"You said Bagby sent Allen to you."

"Yes. Matter of fact, he's in my waiting room right now."

"What have you decided?"

"Only that I can't handle this," he replied. "I'm just an ordinary medical man. When it comes to stuff like this — psychiatric stuff — all I know is that I shouldn't fool with it. That's why I'm calling you."

"I couldn't possibly come out there. . . ."

The doctor chuckled. "We wouldn't have you if you could. . . . I'm sure you understand. . . . No; if you'll agree to take the fellow as a patient we'll get him to you in Baltimore. Incidentally, we'll be responsible for his fees."

"Why don't you use regular government facilities?"

"Because none are available to us," the doctor replied. "You see, Allen is with us under contract. We're required to provide medical services for him, but we're not set up here for his kind of case — I guess it just didn't occur to anyone that scientists might blow their tops like other people. So in a case like this I'm obliged to use my discretion and make the best disposition I can."

I hesitated. The doctor's voice recalled me from my speculations. "What d'you say?"

"I can't say for sure," I answered, "but I'll be glad to see him and let you know."

"That's good enough for me," he said.

Kirk Allen arrived in Baltimore three days after my talk with the doctor. Any speculations I had had about him as a "mad scientist" evaporated when I saw him in my office. A vigorous-looking man of average height, clear-eyed and blond, his seersucker unwrinkled despite the long trip and the humidity, his panama encircled with a gay band, he looked like a junior executive. His manner, as he introduced himself and we made some initial small talk about the weather and his flight east, was charming. He spoke with just enough diffidence to let me know that the situation he now found himself in was slightly embarrassing. His pleasant, well-modu-

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lated baritone voice intrigued me from the first. Although his speech was unmistakably American, it had a vaguely foreign, musical lilt. This observation I chose as the point of entrance for my clinical examination of him.

"You were not born in the United States, were you, Mr. Allen?" I said.

"No," he answered, "but how did you know?"

"Your voice, the way you talk. I would suspect you spoke a softer language at one time. What was it?"

"You're right," he said. "My first language was a Polynesian dialect, but I thought it was pretty well hidden. Does it annoy you?"

"Not at all," I said. "As a matter of fact, I find it quite pleasant. Tell me, how did it happen?"

"My father," he answered, "was a naval officer. I was born in Hawaii, where he was stationed when the First World War broke out. My nurse until I was six years old was a Polynesian woman, and it was her dialect I learned to speak as a small child. Later my father was Commissioner on one of the mandated islands, and we remained there until his death, when I was fourteen. All that time I spoke English with no one except governesses who came out from the States to take care of me, and my parents, whom I hardly saw. My playmates, of course, were all native children and . . ."

Kirk Allen was the only child of his parents' marriage. His father, already an old man when Kirk was born, had been married previously and was even then a grandfather. Kirk recalled him as a man of imposing presence. A commander of fighting vessels under sail, and later of coal-burning men-of-war, he seemed always to have a deck beneath his feet. He was proud, taciturn, stern, and kept his more tender emotions rigorously in check. From those about him he exacted absolute, immediate obedience, for which the only reward was a gruff monosyllabic acknowledgment or, in Kirk's case, a tousling of the boy's hair with his heavy hand. To cross this old man was dangerous. The walking stick he carried was never out of his grasp; there was no one on the island, except his wife and the transient white governesses, who did not at some time feel its weight. And yet, Kirk said, something about his father was warm and kind, something indefinable was softer. That quality was remembered in later years chiefly through the boy's sense of smell; a blend of tobacco, whisky, leather and salt air would evoke, for Kirk, a poignant picture of the aging gentleman who was seldom seen out of naval uniform, who conducted his home and "his island" like the wardroom of a battleship.

Why his mother had married the Commodore — as Kirk's father was called — was a mystery. She was at least thirty-five years younger than he and temperamentally his opposite. Her father had been a wealthy

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diplomat who had served his country in most of the European capitals and died under tragic, somewhat scandalous, circumstances in Italy. She had been educated in France at a convent that specialized in the care of girls from similar backgrounds, but her high spirits and audacity had led her into many amusing and — for those times — daring escapades. When her father died, her mother, who could not tolerate the revelations following his death, retired to Honolulu, where she felt more secure from gossip. Kirk's mother, then eighteen, went with her. The two women lived quietly there. The girl was under constant supervision, her innate gaiety severely suppressed and her social nature restrained. For about five years she devoted herself exclusively to her mother. Then, at a diplomatic function, she met the elderly widower. After a brief courtship she married him, perhaps, Kirk thought, as a desperate means of escaping her mother.

Immediately after marriage Mrs. Allen recovered her natural ebullience. The Commodore was indulgent with his beautiful young wife, proud of her in a fatherly fashion, and rejuvenated by her zestfulness.

Kirk was born in 1918. Immediately after his birth the family went to Paris, where his father was assigned for duty at the peace negotiations. The Allens remained there about a year, and then the Commodore was reassigned to Hawaii. Shortly after their return to the Pacific area the old man was appointed Commissioner over a mandated island. There was, Kirk later heard, some question about accepting this assignment and much debate over whether his mother and he should accompany the Commodore. His parents were reluctant to exchange the comfortable life of Honolulu, where they were the undisputed leaders of society, for the rigors of existence on a remote outpost. They agreed, however, to accept the appointment for one year in order not to prejudice a long record of excellent government service.

The first year of their stay on the island passed rapidly. Both the Commodore and his wife were busy, he with administrative duties and she with welfare projects for the natives. When the year ended the Commodore put in for replacement as planned. His still very young wife joyously anticipated the return to more civilized society and lived only for the day when a new Commissioner would take over. But none came and, finally, the Commodore was informed that his application for replacement had been denied.

At the collapse of her hopes, Kirk's mother reverted to her premarital apathy: she lost her sparkle, became lethargic and melancholy, and went into a decline of spirits from which she did not recover for ten years and more. For a time she spent her energies in quarreling with her husband over their future, vainly urging him to resign. His concept

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of duty, however, was rigid, and although he indulged her in everything else, this he refused to do. Nor would she listen to his suggestion that she and her child return to Hawaii. Obviously needful of his paternal protection, and fearful to face the world without it, she chose to resign herself resentfully. She abandoned the projects she had begun with such enthusiasm only the previous year and withdrew from all social intercourse. Whereas she had formerly taken at least a supervisory interest in Kirk, she now left him completely in the charge of his Hawaiian nurse, native servants, or the governesses who came and went as the years passed. Her relations with the Commodore became merely formal: she would emerge from her room only at dinner time and retire as soon as the meal ended. What she did during the long days, Kirk never knew. She became a shadowy, mysterious figure in his life — someone unknown and apart.

The only other significant, hence formative, human relationships Kirk had during childhood and early adolescence were with his Hawaiian nurse, the native women who took charge of him after her death, and the few white women whom his father employed from the States.

Myna, the Hawaiian nurse, was the first and most important influence on Kirk's development. She had come to the family as a wet-nurse for the infant and remained to mother him until the end of his sixth year. Kirk's recollection of her as a person is unclear, but the feelings evoked by her memory are sweet and strong. She was a dark-skinned, buxom young Polynesian matron who came down from the hill country to seek employment in Honolulu just at the time Kirk was born. She could speak only a few words of English but was bright and intelligent and took over the mothering of the infant the moment she saw him. He was left in her complete care and loved her with an absoluteness which she returned. Not only was he nourished from her huge bosom, but from her vast placidity and comforting presence he obtained everything his real mother denied. He slept with her, ate with her, played with her. In every way Myna treated Kirk as her child and reared him according to her own tradition. His first language was hers, and his early habits were determined by her native culture. Because his mother was busy, during that time, becoming the island's social queen, Myna had her own way with Kirk. Indeed, only when a trivial incident suddenly recalled the boy's presence to his parents did they bother to interfere with her charge. One day a visitor expressed surprise that Kirk prattled only in the dialect he had been taught by his nurse and vigorously ventured an opinion that the child was old enough to begin learning a "white" language. That brought the situation to the attention of Kirk's mother, and for a few months

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Myna was given other duties. As a result, Kirk learned the rudiments of English and was slowly — but only slightly — transformed from a "little savage" into a passable facsimile of a "civilized" child. When Kirk recalled this period of re-education, he remembered it as a painful experience.

But his mother could not maintain enthusiasm very long for the new regime, and she rapidly tired of her unaccustomed role. Gradually, Myna recovered her place. After that, however, the nurse kept a weather eye on the amenities of speech, clothing, manners and habits of her charge, and was careful to insure that Kirk — when his parents were about, at least — appeared to be a child of their culture rather than hers.

Participation in this conspiracy only deepened the love between Kirk and his nurse. By the time the family went to the island which was to be their home for many years, the bond between these two was absolute and enduring. On the island, Kirk was entrusted to Myna. Except for a few hours each day when the boy attended a school organized by his mother for the native children and taught by the wife of an Army officer, he never left Myna's side. She died suddenly when he was six years old, and the space in his life left by her death was never filled.

There were no other white children on the island. Throughout childhood and early adolescence Kirk was haunted by the difference between himself and his companions, a difference not solely of skin color but of social heritage and the innumerable subtleties of life. While he could communicate with his playmates more directly and more fully than he could with white adults even of his own family, he was still set apart from them and different. And this produced a split in his personality that generated two contradictory views of self and world. On one side, a lowering of self-esteem developed — a feeling of inferiority and a sense of having been rejected for good cause. On the other side Kirk developed an internal sense of superiority. Because of the deference accorded him as a white boy, the son of the Commissioner, and because he was not permitted to take the final step toward total community with his native associates, a conviction of difference and special election was born in him.

Between six and nine Kirk was cared for by a succession of native women. These women, he remembers, were cut from the same pattern as his lost Myna, but with none was he as close. Unlike her, they had other preoccupations, often children of their own, and they cared for him dutifully rather than from love.

At nine began the parade of governesses brought out to educate Kirk. There were four or five of them: each remained the better part of a year; all but one left because of boredom. Life on the remote island,

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so romantic in prospect, in actuality proved disappointing. The job of educating Kirk was the single responsibility of each governess: nevertheless, it was onerous. He had an overwhelming curiosity and, even then, an insatiable intellectual appetite. By nine, despite a slow start and casual teaching, he was far advanced in ability to read and comprehend. Forced in upon himself and constrained to seek substitutes for significant interpersonal relationships and experiences, he found in reading his only way of apprehending the world. Carefully, painfully, but later with amazing ease, he ploughed his way through everything readable on the island. The sorry textbooks used in the school, the religious tracts sent by missions, the volumes in the library of a resident Catholic priest, the paperbacks discarded by sailors from vessels that put in for various reasons, the novels brought out by wives of transient island personnel, his father's naval, engineering, navigational and gunnery manuals — all of these were devoured by Kirk, not once but many times over as the years of isolation mounted. Merely to keep up with his sponge-like mind demanded more of the governesses than they were prepared to give. The best they could do — and in some areas they did that well — was to organize and discipline what he already knew.

Only two of these women made any real impression on Kirk. One was his first governess, a middle-aged widow from a Far Western state, whose passion for cleanliness was pathological and whose hatred and mistrust of the natives amounted to hysteria. From the moment she arrived until the day she left Kirk's life was a hell of prohibitions and negative commands. This miserable person tried to foist on the boy her compulsions, her fears, her prejudices. She insisted on physical cleanliness to a degree beyond reason. At least twice each day he was scrubbed with scalding water; the slightest spot on his shirt was made the occasion for a complete change of clothing. She imbued Kirk with such dread of contamination from his familiar, innocuous surroundings that he threaded his way through the world like a cat on a sideboard. Because this pasteurized virago considered the native children "filthy niggers," Kirk was forbidden even to converse with his friends and disbarred from any fellowship except hers. After she went, he was again free to consort with the children, but he could never recover his former sense of easy naturalness with them.

While this woman — "Sterile Sally," Kirk called her during his analysis — did not remain long on the island, she affected the boy profoundly. Because of her, he was pushed more deeply inside himself. As a consequence of this added isolation, his fantasy life — until then of a fashion and degree usual among lonely children — increased sharply.

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Day-dreaming now came to occupy much of his time, and there appeared those lavish, imaginative reconstructions of the world which were to be so significant for him and so characteristic of his life up to the day we met.

The initial fantasy that Kirk toyed with during Sterile Sally's residence was a childish hodgepodge, constructed from odd remnants of reading. He identified himself with characters from the *Oz* books, for example, and mentally played out a cordial existence in a friendlier, more exciting world. This primary experience unfolded the imaginative facility and the technique of mental detachment which he developed to astonishing proportions in adulthood.

At eleven a new governess entered Kirk's life, and opened for him another category of experience. She was a young woman whom Kirk recalls as quite attractive, who remained only long enough to introduce the boy to sex — and run off with the schoolteacher's husband. Here is Kirk's story of his sexual seduction:

"You must remember that life on the island was very different from life as you know it. Kids mature more rapidly there and sex is treated in another way. Sex play, for example, is not only open but encouraged by adults of the native community. The natural curiosity of kids is unchecked and the exploration of each other's bodies — which here children do in secret — is conducted openly. Matter of fact, the adults, if they attend to it at all, do so with amusement. Later, of course, the whole thing is surrounded with odd taboos because of their involved kinship regulations, but none of these apply before a certain age. The loin cloth or breech clout is the only article of clothing worn by men, while the women wear only a skirt or, if they work around whites, a loose dress. Practically the first thing anyone does when he enters his own hut is to discard whatever he's been wearing and go about naked. Until ceremonial initiation for boys and marriage for girls, children ordinarily wear nothing except when they go to school or church. I imagine things are different now, but when I lived there that's the way it was.

"Anyhow, this much was true and probably still is: kids know all about sex from the beginning, and except for the few taboos about who can do what with whom after initiation *there's almost absolute freedom.*

"Like any other child, I knew what there was to know about sex and it never bothered me in any way. Although adults showed a certain restraint when I was around, in this area the kids accepted me wholly and I participated in their sex play. There was no difference between me and my playmates except that I was a shade lighter than the lighest of them and my hair was softer and blondish and I usually wore shorts.

"When Miss Lilian arrived — that

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was her name I now remember — I was, at least by her standards, a sexual sophisticate, although I hadn't actually had intercourse. She noticed my physical development and commented on it when she gave me my first bath. I paid no attention to her comment at that time; but as the days passed she behaved in such a fashion that it was impossible, even at my age, to ignore her preoccupation with the whole matter of sex. Not only did she question me closely about the sex behavior of the natives; she also asked me many questions about my own experience. Maybe it was my casualness that led her on. . . . I don't know. At any rate, it wasn't long before she took to undressing before me — exhibiting herself, I guess you'd call it — and being provocative in a way I had never seen any woman behave. Native women and girls certainly never acted that way. Even in their complete nakedness there was a kind of modesty — or maybe it was just unconcern. But I soon understood that Miss Lilian was urging me on — and she succeeded.

"I remember I tried to hide my reaction — not out of shame, you understand, but because of some vague feeling that it was somehow not right to have her see it. It couldn't have been shame because shame and sex, then, had nothing to do with each other. Shame among the natives was connected with other things — eating in the presence of others except at ceremonial banquets, failure to pay a debt, neglecting to employ the correct form of address to someone, doing anything taboo; these things occasioned shame, not things connected with sex. So what I felt when I reacted watching Miss Lilian wasn't shame. Now I think it might have been a feeling of wrongfulness, a sort of prescience (if you like) of danger that this revelation of sexuality would betray me into behavior I should avoid."

(Later Kirk understood this feeling he so painfully tried to describe during our first interviews. Both the feeling and its significance became clear when, during analysis, it was revealed that Miss Lilian was the first and only woman with whom Kirk had had intercourse. She was, of course, taboo for him, as were all white women — a consequence of his deeply unconscious incestuous fears. So the feeling Kirk was talking about is really connected with guilt — which explains not only this incident but its drastic immediate as well as long-term consequences.)

"Needless to say, Miss Lilian spotted my aroused state before I could hide it — and that was that. And after that she was insatiable.

"How did I feel about this? Well, I was of two minds. I'd be lying if I said I didn't enjoy some of it; but I'd be lying even more if I said it was all pleasure. It wasn't. There were times when I had to run away from her lust, lock her out of my room, or even threaten to tell the Commodore. Later, when I found

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out about her affair with the schoolteacher's husband, I'd threaten to tell him. But even worse was the physical debility from so much sexual activity — remember, I was only eleven years old. I grew vague and listless, haggard, run-down — maybe not from sex but certainly from loss of sleep and muscular fatigue. When I was unable to respond she would get furious. Sometimes she would beat me, claw at me with her nails, bite me. . . .

"If she had remained on the island much longer than she did, Miss Lilian, I think, would have headed into real trouble. However, the schoolteacher's husband, an Army officer, came along. I don't recall much about that. She sneaked off to see him a few times, and then one morning both of them were gone. Apparently they bribed the master of one of the merchant vessels and were smuggled aboard just before the ship sailed. She didn't even say goodby and I can't say I was very distressed about her going."

With Miss Lilian gone Kirk returned to his usual pursuits with an even greater sense of isolation. Brief as her stay had been, she had brought about an almost complete severance of the boy from his playmates, for she had been not only sexually possessive but jealous of attention paid to anyone other than herself, and had demanded his constant presence, his total preoccupation. After she left, there was no way of closing the gap his absence from the group had created, no way of resuming intimacy.

Other factors, also, now alienated Kirk. His experiences with the nymphomanic governess had catapulted him into premature adulthood beyond the range of his friends and he could not have achieved fellowship with them even had they been willing. But most important was the fact that he assisted his own alienation unconsciously. It became his self-punishment for an awful, ever-present sense of guilt, and this, in turn, exacerbated the inferiority he already suffered. In a dim and at that time inexplicable way the boy became plagued with a kind of horror of his actions, a horror that can be compared with what the natives of his island felt when they trespassed the boundaries of taboo. So, feeling that he had "sinned," Kirk, like any islander, was covered with guilt, which he chose to expiate by separation from society in the same manner as a native might by disappearing into the jungle.

In his isolation Kirk returned to his books, now his only friends. The fantasies which he had largely abandoned during Miss Lilian's residence once more claimed his attention. While outwardly engaged in reading, exploring the island, or studying with his new governess, he was inwardly living a full and exciting life. From the stories he read he constructed another and different universe, peopled with characters from the tales of his favorite authors and

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infused with vivid movement, dramatic event and colorful detail. In the beginning such fantasies were random, fitful, inconsistent and loosely constructed as most daydreams tend to be. He did not concentrate on any given set of characters, events, or places, but freely developed whatever took his fancy — which then followed rather closely the book or story he happened to be reading. But all that changed in his twelfth year when a trivial coincidence altered the boy's life.

One day a large crate of books was delivered to the mission house. Kirk, whose appetite for books was well known to the missionary, was invited to borrow whatever he wished. Unlike most such deliveries, this turned out to be a windfall. Instead of the usual collection of sermons, dog-eared children's books, sets of inspirational essays, and biographies of characters unknown to anyone but the biographers, this shipment contained many novels, including a whole set of books by a highly imaginative and prolific writer.* Gleefully, Kirk took his pick and settled himself for a season of pleasure.

The first book Kirk chose to read was a novel by a famous English author. He had already made this writer's acquaintance through other books, which he had enjoyed immensely, and now looked forward to a tale whose interest was guaranteed. He had hardly begun reading, however, when he suddenly became aware of the fact that the name of the hero of this novel was the same as his own. Momentarily, this gave him pause. And he describes it, "a kind of shock ran through me: for a minute I felt completely disoriented." This feeling dissolved rapidly and Kirk returned to the book. But now he read with greater interest, and as the story unrolled he found himself intent and involved as never before. When he finished the book — the same day he had begun it — he turned immediately to the first page and read it through again. After a third reading he finally set the book aside.

Several days later the experience of encountering a fictional character bearing his name was repeated — this time in a volume of semiphilosophical reflections by an American stylist of the 'twenties. The discovery once more shocked Kirk: it led him into passionate participation in the book, followed by so many rereadings that parts of it were automatically committed to memory.

It was not long after these two experiences that Kirk again came across his own name applied to a character of fiction. This time, however, the experience caused no shock of surprise: Kirk says, "I think I expected it somehow, and when it happened it was as if I had known it all the time and was finding some-

* The reader acquainted with fantasy fiction may try to deduce the name of this writer — and possibly the true name of "Kirk Allen." — A. B.

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thing that had been lost." On this occasion the character who bore his name was the protagonist in a long series of fantasies by another American author. Through volume after volume of strange and adventurous tales this figure weaved a perilous way as all-conquering hero — a prototype for the modern Superman. Fascinated, Kirk followed. And soon there came about in him an uncanny transformation which can be described only in his own words. . . .

"As I read about the adventures of Kirk Allen in these books the conviction began to grow on me that the stories were not only true to the very last detail but that they were about *me*. In some weird and inexplicable way *I knew that what I was reading was my biography*. Nothing in these books was unfamiliar to me: I recognized everything — the scenes, the people, the furnishings of rooms, the events, even the words that were spoken — recognized all this with a sense of familiarity that one has when he sees a house in which he has lived or a friend from years gone by. The whole business, if you like, was one long, almost interminable, *déjà vu* experience — as you psychologists call it. My everyday life began to recede at this point. In fact, it became fiction — and, as it did, the books became my reality. To daily affairs, to the task of staying alive, eating, studying, moving about on the island, I gave little attention — for this was dream. Real life — *my* real life — was in the books. There I lived: there I had my being."

Kirk read the numerous volumes of his "biography" over and over again until he was as familiar with them as with his own reflection in the mirror. Soon he no longer needed the books "to refresh my memory," but was able to recapitulate them entirely in his mind. While his corporeal body was living the life of a mundane boy, the vital part of him was far off on another planet, courting beautiful princesses, governing provinces, warring with strange enemies. But it should not be thought that he was content during this period after the books were discarded merely to rehearse the experiences recorded in them. Now, using "his biographer's" material as a base, he took off on his own. Assisted by the maps, charts, diagrams, architectural layouts, genealogical schemes and timetables painstakingly worked out while using the books for his guide, he filled in spaces between the volumes with fantasy "recollections" of his own; and when this was done, he began the task of his life: that of picking up where his "biographer" had left off and recording the subsequent history of the heroic Kirk Allen.

When Kirk was fourteen his father, the Commodore, died. Almost immediately his mother awakened from her ten-year apathy and prepared to leave the island. She arranged for Kirk to be admitted to a preparatory

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school in the eastern part of the United States, accompanied him there, and when satisfied that he had settled in the school, she left to begin a restless Odyssey. For fifteen years thereafter, until she died on an island off the Greek coast, she moved about the world. Only occasionally during these years did she visit Kirk, and then but briefly; nor did she write to him except when it became necessary to discuss financial matters.

Meanwhile, Kirk entered a new type of existence, very different from the one he had known, yet marked as before by loneliness and isolation. He found it all but impossible to relate to his school fellows casually; and although he made a few friends there — and later at the University — he was unable to enter into real companionship with anyone. He devoted himself to his studies, in which he progressed with amazing rapidity, and to the development of his fantasies.

At nineteen Kirk entered one of the great Eastern universities. Here his interests solidified and he pointed his effort toward a career in science. Three years later he matriculated for advanced study. His scientific talents were immediately recognized by his professors. After the first semester he was given a research fellowship under the joint auspices of the University and the United States Government. When he completed the requirements for his doctoral degree he was mustered into military service and assigned to a special project then approaching a significant conclusion. When the Second World War ended (in a manner that had something to do with Kirk's work) he was discharged. There followed a year of study abroad under a much-coveted grant. When he returned he was invited to join the project at X Reservation.

Throughout the years between the discovery of his "biography" and his appearance in Baltimore, a large segment of Kirk's time and a portion of his mind were devoted to the detailed development of his abiding fantasy. Whenever he was not totally preoccupied with scholastic or scientific work — and often even then, since his fantasy and his research interests (and assignments) coincided in certain ways — he was engaged in weaving an ever more closely knit imaginative mental life, the main lines of which were dictated by the recorded "biography" he had consumed so avidly on the island before the age of fourteen. But, over the years, some remarkable changes were made in his mode of fantasying. Here is how Kirk describes it:

"As you know, I became convinced the books were about me, that somehow the author had obtained a knowledge of my life and had written its story. So the first thing I had to do was remember, and it seemed to me that I actually recalled everything he described. It was, of course, a curious position to

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be in — an adolescent boy remembering the adventures of himself as a grown man. But I got around this difficulty by convincing myself that the books had been composed in the future and had been sent back by some means into the present for my instruction. It's hard to explain, but I soon developed the notion — now a favorite one with science-fiction writers — of the co-existence of temporal dimensions so that the past and the future are simultaneous with the present. This made it possible to live a current life but, all the same, to *remember the future.*

"My first effort, then, was to remember. I started by fixing in my mind, and later on paper in the form of maps, genealogical tables, and so on, what the author of my 'biography' had put down. When I had this mastered, by remembering, I was able to correct his errors, fill in many details, and close gaps between one volume of the biography and the next. It took some years and an enormous amount of effort to accomplish this; but when it was done I had the tremendous satisfaction of knowing that I possessed the complete story of my life up to a certain point, and I was able to review it — actually live it in my head — while I carried on my everyday business.

"After some time I became bored with reliving my future life and intrigued with the question of what was going to happen to Kirk Allen — or, from where I sat, what *had* happened to him — after the place at which the writer's 'biography' ended. You will recall that when the series of volumes ends, Kirk Allen is still a young and vigorous man. So I set myself the task of remembering what was going to happen to me beyond the point reached by my 'biographer.' There were no guidelines for this, so the job became terribly difficult. One of the great difficulties, by the way, was to distinguish between imagination and recall. I knew how easy it would be merely to imagine a future for Kirk Allen and fool myself into believing it. But I wanted truth — curious as this may seem to you — and I soon developed a technique for distinguishing between — don't laugh! — imagination and recall. I discovered that always, when I imagined, some small detail, usually an insignificant thing — a color, a view, a costume, a name . . . something — was out of place; but when I *remembered*, everything fit. Pursuing this technique, I became remarkably adept at distinguishing between the reality of my recollections of the unrecorded future and the imaginative excursions to which I was so liable. For many years I devoted myself to this operation — indeed, until I returned from abroad and began work on the project I was on when I came here. And as I continued this process of — what? — predictive recall? — I kept careful records of it, writing down and preserving every detail.

"When I got back from Europe the whole business took a new turn.

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"One night soon after moving to the X Reservation I was preparing a map of a territory Kirk Allen had explored during an expedition to a planet in another galaxy. I won't stop to explain this — you'll find it in the papers I'm going to give you. Anyhow, I was working on this map very determinedly, stopping only now and then to refresh my memory. Somehow the details refused to come clear, although I had a vivid memory of flying over the territory at a fairly low altitude and taking stereoscopic photographs of it. I also remembered that when I arrived back at my home planet from this adventure, I gave a set of the pictures to the proper scientists at the Intergalactic Institute, but kept copies of the originals for myself, planning to study them more closely later. I even remembered exactly where they were — in a filing cabinet in a secret room in my palace. I tried to recall whether I had ever looked at the photos after filing them, but I could not and concluded Kirk Allen had simply put them away and forgotten them. Well, the unfinished map lay before me on my drafting board, while the information I needed to correct and complete the map was more remote from me in space than the farthest star I could see, and far ahead of me in time. It was the first time I had encountered such a situation — ordinarily my memory served me perfectly — and I was perplexed and angry, as frustrated as I have ever been. I thought of those blasted photographs stuck away there in a place no one but I could get to. And then I thought: 'If only . . . if only I were there, right now, I would go directly to those files and get those pictures!'

"No sooner had I given voice to this thought than my whole being seemed to respond with a resounding 'Why not?' — and in that same moment I *was* there!

"How can I explain this to you? One moment I was just a scientist on X Reservation bending over a drawing board in a clapboard B.Q. in the middle of an American desert; — the next moment I was Kirk Allen, Lord of a planet in an interplanetary empire in a distant universe, garbed in the robes of his exalted office, rising from the carved desk he had been sitting at, walking toward a secret room in his palace, entering it, going over to a filing cabinet in a recess in the wall, extracting an envelope of photographs, leaving the room and retracing his steps, sitting again at his desk, and studying the pictures with intense concentration.

"It was over in a matter of minutes, and I was again at the drawing board — the self you see here. But I knew the experience was real; and to prove it I now had a vivid recollection of the photographs, could see them as clearly as if they were still in my hands, and had no trouble at all completing the map.

"You can imagine how this experience affected me. I was stunned

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by it, shaken to the core, but excited as I had never been. In some way I could not comprehend, by merely desiring it to be so, I had crossed the immensities of Space, broken out of Time, and merged with — literally become — that distant and future self whose like I had until now been remembering. Don't ask me to explain. I can't, although God knows I've tried! Have I discovered the secret of teleportation? Do I have some special psychic equipment? Some unique organ or what Charles Fort called a 'wild talent'? Damned if I know!

"From that night on I have spent more and more time being the Kirk Allen of the future. At any time, no matter where I am or what I am doing, I can will to be him, and at once I am. As him, as my future self, I live his life; and when I return to this present self, I bring back the memories I have of that future and so am able to correct the records I am keeping. Now, you see, I no longer have to depend on memory: I actually live what the future Kirk Allen lives; and return here to amend or add to the biography, to the maps and tables and other stuff I will give you to examine. Please don't ask me how I get back to this present self — I can't tell you any more than I can tell you how I *become* him by merely wishing. When I am him, I don't seem to know of this earthly self — I guess I've forgotten it somehow — so I could not wish to return. It just happens — that's all. . . .

"But there is one thing more I should tell you, and that is that I am aware of a great disparity in the passage of time between events in the lives of these two selves. My existence here, in this present, goes at a pace you'd call normal; while as Kirk Allen of the future time goes fast, seems compressed. What I mean is that the time I spend as *him* — although as him I experience it at a normal pace — compresses into only minutes on the clock my mundane self keeps. So I live perhaps a year or more as *that* Kirk Allen in a few minutes of *this* Kirk Allen's time. But what got me into trouble, I think, and led to my being sent here, is the fact that I've been spending more and more of my time as the other Kirk Allen, leading more and more the life there, going more frequently and staying longer. I don't think I can be blamed for this — his is such an exciting life compared with mine; but of course I have a job to do here. . . ."

The life history of Kirk, as I have set it down here, took some days to obtain. Although always polite and cooperative he was reluctant to part with its intimate details and they had to be extracted from him by careful, sometimes subtle, questioning. The chief difficulty, however, was that he regarded himself as completely normal, was thoroughly convinced of the reality of all that he experienced, and could not comprehend its significance in terms of

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his sanity. He acknowledged, of course, that his experiences were extraordinary, that they were, to put it mildly, fantastic; but he believed, as he said, that they were due to some unknown psychic quality or ability with which he had been somehow endowed. And toward this unknown factor he had a casual attitude: if it was there — and it evidently was — he would make the most of it, he would exploit it, he would enjoy it. Why it should interest anyone else, especially why it should cause such a fuss, he could not understand. When I asked him if he ever intended to share his secret with the world, he replied that he could not. He felt, he said, incapable of communicating it to others since he was totally ignorant of why or how he was able to do what he did. However, he had thought someday to publish the material he was collecting. He would do this, perhaps, as fiction — since he could not expect the world to acknowledge it as fact. Maybe he would release the information as "biographical romances," as his "biographer" had done; as tales amending the errors of the available volumes and continuing them beyond the point at which they left off.

"Then why," I asked him, "are you so compulsive about getting every detail absolutely correct? If you merely intend to present all of this as fiction, does it really matter if an occasional comma is misplaced?"

"You don't seem to understand," Kirk said with a small sigh for my obvious stupidity; "you don't seem to understand that this is *my* life I'm investigating. I want to know everything about it. I'm careful — compulsive, you say — for *my* sake. It matters to *me*. It has to be right for *me!*"

From our initial talks — devoted chiefly, as I have said, to gathering the history outlined — I received two impressions. The first was of Kirk's utter madness; the second, of the life-sustaining necessity of his psychosis. As regards the former, what was of paramount significance to me as a therapist was the fact I have already mentioned: Kirk's inability to comprehend, to admit even to himself, his mental abnormality (or, to put it another way, the abnormality of his experiences). Now the lay reader may be surprised at these statements: he perhaps thinks that a conviction of sanity is an element in every instance of psychosis, that the person involved is so "far gone" that he does not know he is mad. But this is not so — or at least it is only so in that proportion of cases where brain and central nervous system have been debilitated by toxins or disease. For the most part psychotics are aware of their disturbance, aware either because they suffer somehow through it or are made to suffer for it by others. In only the rarest circumstance does a mentally afflicted person escape suffering, and hence an

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acute knowledge of his own disorder. But such a one was Kirk: his madness was a private one, and against the wall of Kirk's absolute conviction of sanity — a phenomenon so rare — I was, at first, completely helpless.

The second impression — that Kirk's very life was sustained wholly by his madness — rendered his case even more difficult to handle. While it is true that every psychosis represents a life-saving maneuver on the part of the individual, is his way of solving the conflict between the world and himself, in practically every instance there remains some area of life that — through therapy or otherwise — can be made to yield satisfactions comparable to those available to the person through his madness. In the case of Kirk, it seemed, there was none. What, after all, could compete with the unending gratifications of his fantasy? How, then, could he be restored to sanity and yet remain alive?

I pondered these and other questions for many days. Meanwhile, Kirk turned over to me all of his records. By now his trunks had arrived in Baltimore, and while he busied himself finding a suitable place to live, and then settled in for what promised to be a long stay — for I had decided by this time to treat him despite the difficulties of the case — I began my study of the material he had collected over the years.

It is impossible to convey more than a bare impression of Kirk's "records." In the space at my disposal here I can hardly do more than itemize. There were, to begin with, about twelve thousand pages of typescript comprising the amended "biography" of Kirk Allen. This was divided into some 200 chapters and read like fiction. Appended to these pages were approximately 2,000 more of notes in Kirk's handwriting, containing corrections necessitated by his more recent "researches," and a huge bundle of scraps and jottings on envelopes, receipted bills, laundry slips, sheets from memo pads, etc. These latter were largely incomprehensible since they were written in Kirk's private shorthand, while some of them were little more than hasty designs or sketches, mathematical equations, or symbolic representations of something or other: each, however, was carefully numbered and lettered with red pencil to indicate where it belonged in the main script.

Apart from the bulky manuscript with its appendix and notes there were:

a glossary of names and terms that ran to more than 100 pages: 82 full-color maps carefully drawn to scale, 23 of planetary bodies in four projections, 31 of land masses on these planets, 14 labeled "Kirk Allen's Expedition to ———," the remainder of cities on the various planets: 161 architectural sketches and elevations, some colored, some drawn only in ink but all carefully

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scaled and annotated: 12 genealogical tables: an 18-page description of the galactic system in which Kirk Allen's home planet was contained, with 4 astronomical charts, one for each of the seasons, and 9 star maps of the skies from observatories on other planets in the system: a 200-page history of the empire Kirk Allen ruled, with a 3-page table of dates and names of battles or outstanding historical events: a series of 44 folders containing from 2 to 20 pages apiece, each dealing with some aspect of the planet over which Kirk Allen of the future ruled, with life in his imperial city, or with a phase of existence on this planet or elsewhere in the system; typical titles, neatly printed on these folders, were, "The Fauna of Srom Olma I," "The Transportation System of Seraneb," "Science of Srom," "The Geology of Srom Olma I," "The Metabiology of the Valley Dwellers," "The History of the Intergalactic Scientific Institute," "Parapsychology of Srom Norbra X," "Economic Foundations of the Valley Society," "Sociology on Srom Olma I," "The Application of Unified Field Theory and the Mechanics of the Stardrive to Space Travel," "The Unique Brain Development of the Crystopeds of Srom Norbra X," "Anthropological Studies on Srom Olma I," "The Religious Beliefs of the Valley Dwellers," "Manufacturing Processes and Dye Chemistry," "Fire Worship and Sacrifice on Srom Sodrat II," "Food Distribution in Seraneb," "Sex Habits and Practices of the Crystopeds," "Plant Biology and Genetic Science of Srom Olma I," and so on: finally, 306 drawings, some in water colors, some in chalk, some in crayon, of people, animals, plants, insects, weapons, utensils, machines, articles of clothing, vehicles, instruments and furniture. . . .

Such was the material Kirk Allen placed at my disposal for study at the beginning of his therapy. The reader can imagine for himself my dismay at the sheer bulk of this matter: I do not know if he can appreciate with what misgivings I approached the task of weaning this man from his madness.

The atmosphere in which Kirk's therapy commenced was a poor one to begin with. In his behavior toward me he acted the part of a noble opponent who courteously permits his antagonist to choose the time, the place; even the weapons of their encounter. Unfailingly polite, respectful almost to the point of burlesque, he submitted to my ministrations, attempted to follow my instructions to the letter, and gave me every possible scope for my activities. For my part I saw at once that all his politeness, his courtesy, his respectfulness, was little more than the mask for a deep antagonism. My declaration that I would accept him for treatment could only mean I considered him mad, and the fear this provoked induced hostility, which Kirk disguised, in these early days, as excessive politeness.

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The situation between us was thus a very tense one when, the history having been collected, the "records" inspected, and the therapeutic scenery set, I prepared to begin the treatment of this patient in earnest. So far as I could, from the beginning I ignored the aspect of "challenge" implied in Kirk's attitude. Instead, because it was obvious that both his temperament and training were scientific, I set myself to capitalize on the one quality he had demonstrated throughout his life, the quality that had inspired his first attempts to deal with his loneliness, the quality that urged him toward a scientific career: his curiosity.

It will be recalled that while Kirk was untroubled by the question of the validity of his para-psychic experiences, he acknowledged ignorance about the mechanics of their operation. He talked vaguely of "teleportation," a special in-built psychic "organ," a highly developed "telepathic" sense, or a "wild talent" of some kind. On the pretext of discovering just how he did all the remarkable things he reported and, beneath this, just why it was he, Kirk Allen, to whom these special gifts were given, I strove to enlist his active participation in treatment. This meant, of course, that at least for the time being I "accepted" the validity of his experiences, the "truth" of the material in the records, the "facts" of Kirk's curious reports of travel through time and space.

When Kirk appreciated that we had achieved a common ground where we could work together on a problem that intrigued him so — when he understood that I was not out to prove him "crazy" and that, therefore, I constituted no threat to the careful but unstable structure on which his entire existence was based — he dropped his defenses and fell to the mutual task with enthusiasm.

For many months, motivated thus by his curiosity and given tremendous impetus by the security he felt in our relationship, Kirk and I progressed swiftly toward the goal we had set ourselves. Always holding in abeyance the primary question — indeed, always ignoring that such a question existed — we concentrated on the problem of the moment, which may be phrased as: What had happened to Kirk to render him "sensitive" to the extraordinary experiences he reported? Our emphasis was, of course, on his actual biography, on the formative events, relationships and associations of his childhood and adolescence. Nevertheless, so that he should not lack the assurance that no detail was being overlooked in our pursuit of an answer to this problem, I consented to — as a matter of fact, even urged him toward — the exploration of additional means to discovering the source or sources of his "sensitivity." Accordingly, from time to time Kirk submitted to various examinations I arranged for him. Under an assumed

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name he put himself through the Diagnostic Clinic at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, received a thoroughgoing neurological examination including electroencephalogram, air-injection engrams, and X-ray studies of his cranium from an outstanding neurologist of my acquaintance, was surveyed thoroughly by an endocrinologist, and even studied in meticulous detail by a physical anthropologist. Needless to say, the outcome of all these elaborate tests and measurements was nil: in every respect save the psychological Kirk was distressingly average.

Since it is not my intention here to deal at length with Kirk's analysis — particularly with the dynamics of his disturbance — but rather to tell a more personal tale, I shall attend only briefly to the findings arrived at during the early months of treatment. Suffice to say that by the end of this period I was in a position to formulate, at least to my own satisfaction, the underlying psychic factors accounting for his psychosis. Briefly, they were as follows:

As the reader has suspected, it all went back to the very earliest years of his life when the child was isolated, cut off, and forced to live in an arid emotional waste wherein his deepest needs were left unsatisfied. Quite likely the incident that was to prove traumatic for him and determine, to a great extent, his future pattern, occurred when his family so abruptly severed his almost symbiotic relationship with the Polynesian nurse, Myna. Until then he had lived in her protecting and nourishing shadow, with all his needs, biological and emotional, gratified. After that event, however, a most radical alteration took place in his world; not only was he denied access to what had by now become for him the fountainhead of his security, but with this enforced separation the pivotal point of his contact with the universe was lost. He could not, that is to say, even communicate with others, nor could he employ any of his former techniques of behavior to obtain that which he — or any child — required for normal development. And while the period of his separation from Myna was brief, the experience was poignant enough to induce anxiety to such a degree that his infant mind, threatened with permanent engulfment, strained to master it by the only means available at that stage: fantasy.

The first world Kirk built for himself was constructed at an age when most children are consolidating the gains of infancy and passing into a childhood in which the chief mental operation is the testing of reality. This was a phase through which Kirk, then, never went; and it left him with a stunted capacity to distinguish between the real world and that which was the product of his own mental functioning. So far as the details of this first interior world are concerned, we have little to inform us because of Kirk's hazy recollection. We can assume, how-

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ever, that its characteristics were determined by the same factors that were always to underwrite his fantasying. Converting his loneliness, his littleness, his feelings of rejection, his childish helplessness, and his miserably deprived and inferior state to their opposites, then (as later) he was undoubtedly the obverse of these in his fantasied person: the master rather than the victim of events and things.

So much for the first manifestations of Kirk's disorder and their determinants. There followed then the generation of those elements responsible for the two most intriguing and characteristic qualities of Kirk's fantasying: the qualities of time and distance.

Myna, it will be recalled, was restored to Kirk, but not until the separation damage described had been done, and not to the degree of intimacy that had obtained prior to the rude divorce of the child from this one person who mattered. Moreover, her return and the removal of the Commodore's family to the mandated island coincided, and were followed in relatively swift succession by Kirk's mother's virtual retirement and the subsequent death of the faithful Polynesian nurse. These events had also to be mastered by the boy, and so they were by the imaginative manipulations now familiar to him. But during this period produced both by the events themselves and by normal processes common to all children there entered into Kirk's psychological development more and more the elements of aggression and hostility.

Frustrated in all of his affectional aspirations, isolated and turned in upon himself, Kirk began to nourish intense feelings of hatred which rapidly declared themselves in destructive fantasies. Because he could not tolerate the devastating emotions to which continual denial of his natural needs gave birth — emotions that provoked urges to aggress, to hate, and to destroy — he adopted a defense designed at once to discharge the accompanying feelings while protecting him from their effects. This he did, at first, by employing distance, and later time, as the central features of his fantasies. Accordingly, in the years between Myna's death and his discovery of the books of his "biography," Kirk's fantasies acquired three new aspects: they became less innocuous in content, were removed from his immediate neighborhood to progressively further places, and tended more and more to be set outside his present time.

When the books came into Kirk's possession he unconsciously seized upon them as a perfect vehicle of defense. The premature sexual experiences with Miss Lilian, especially their intensive, guilt-laden, animal-like character, had increased his burden of inner hostility, his smoldering aggressiveness, and his destructive urgings. The capacity to divert these thoughts and feelings

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through fantasy projection was breaking down, not because he lacked imaginative invention but simply because no fantasy structure he could then envision with his limited reality resources was powerful enough to carry the tremendous weight of his negative impulses. The discovery of the books, then, was a life-saving accident.

It needed no more than the fortuitous correspondence of names to create the bridge across which Kirk traveled from painful reality to all-satisfying fantasy. Through vistas evoked by the books, the endless scope for his impulses, urges and needs became available. With boundless universes of space and endless maneuverability in time at his immediate command, he could no longer be threatened by inner ragings. And in the years to come, it goes without saying, he needed these light-years of distance, these eons of time; for, after his father's death and during the lonely period that followed, the inner rage, bitterness and fury grew to frightening proportions.

The first strange shift in the mechanics of fantasying that Kirk reported — the shift from merely recalling what had been written in the "biography" to amending it by imaginative excursion beyond the confines of the books — was revealed by analysis to have been a natural psychic consequence of his strange development. Apparently the "biography" was unable to supply all of Kirk's requirements for discharge of anxiety and mastery of experience, and when he reached this point he was forced to invent new material — or alter the old — so that it would take account of his needs more adequately. To discover this mental "gimmick" was one of the simpler tasks of Kirk's analysis. Its disclosure carried us far along the path of reconstructing his life in its finest details, for with this insight employed as a skeleton key to his past, it became possible to show him, eventually, how (and why) an almost one-to-one correspondence existed between his fantasy constructs and his actual past experiences.

The second shift in technique — that from recall of the future beyond the "biography's" scope and amendation of detail to correspond with real experience — was again a natural defensive psychic maneuver, but a maneuver necessitated by a new element that entered Kirk's life soon after he settled in his job at X Reservation.

Following his shattering encounter with the nymphomanic governess, Kirk shunned sexual experience in reality and avoided, as much as he could, all relationships with women. In his fantasy life, however, where it was safe, he was not only sexually alert but a notorious and successful lover. This was the situation when, on taking up his assignment at X Reservation, Kirk found himself once more threatened by sex.

Among the scientists working with-

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Kirk on the project at X was an attractive geologist who had recently been divorced. She was slightly older than Kirk, an intelligent, vivacious, witty woman of wide social experience who was also internationally famous for her work. The only unattached female member of the scientific staff, she was in great demand among the men, most of whom were bachelors. Nevertheless, it was Kirk who interested her and on him that she exerted all her charm. Of this quality she must have had an abundance, since she succeeded where many other girls had failed and rapidly developed a close association with the preoccupied young physicist. Soon they were meeting frequently, attending occasional social functions together, and sharing as a couple whatever entertainments the isolated community had to offer. Kirk, however, regarded this association otherwise than his friend: for him it was a pleasant companionship in which the gender of his partner was incidental, and it was his intention to keep it that way. The girl had other plans. The more reticent he acted, the bolder her advances became, until a point was reached where her demands were overt and unequivocal. When this happened Kirk attempted to dissolve the relationship, but she would not have it so and pursued him relentlessly.

On the night Kirk achieved for the first time what he was thereafter to regard as the most crucial experience in his life — the illusion of actual tenancy of the body and being of the future Kirk Allen on another planet — his problem with the fair geologist had reached a climax. He had dined with her in her apartment and after dinner she had made a frank overture which literally scared him out of his wits. In great agitaton he fled to his own room and, in an effort to calm himself, turned to his "records." In his preoccupation with them, it seems, the solution of complete flight into unreality appeared as the best available means whereby his threatened self could be preserved, and he unconsciously seized upon it. Thereafter, it became his "escape hatch" from intolerable actuality.

What is of great interest to the psychoanalyst, of course, is the fact that this solution of total flight into fantasy occurred to Kirk while he was consciously engaged in the preparation of a map.

It is notorious that maps, charts, architectural plans and other similar material often have the unconscious symbolic significance of the human form, especially of curiosity or perplexity regarding sexual details. In the incident that precipitated the new pattern of Kirk's fantasying, then, it can be seen with unusual clarity how remarkably effective fantasy is as a defense against unconscious pressures: not only are problems or strains relegated to a time and place that render them harmless, but there, in addition, they are solved or relieved.

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By the end of the first year of analysis, although we had moved rapidly and accumulated much information, Kirk and I found ourselves in a most curious position. By this time we had been able to work out the entire mechanics of the gigantic fantasy, we had traced its sources to their roots, and we had even elaborated, in meticulous detail, the one-to-one correspondence of experiential fact with imaginative feature. But none of this affected my patient's behavior to the slightest degree. Although he conceded that the foundations of his psychosis (which we still avoided calling by this name) rested in the past, although he recognized it as the self-salvaging maneuver of escape from reality it was, although he understood as well as I the why and how of its operation — nevertheless, he showed no inclination to abandon it.

Almosy daily he entered the strange realm of his elaborate preoccupation, returning therefrom each time with some exciting bit of news or some colorful item to add to the "records." Outwardly he maintained the façade of an integrated and well-functioning person. Since he was free to dispose of his time and energy as he pleased, and had no other obligation than to keep his appointments with me, he was in an enviable position to lead a leisurely and uncomplicated life. To keep himself busy he attended lectures at the universities in and near Baltimore, made acquaintances among the scientists here, and participated casually in the intellectual life of the community. In sum, he was quite content.

I, on the other hand, was not. More than this, I was downright unhappy over the situation and perplexed as I have never been before about a patient. For I saw that the gains we had made against Kirk's madness were more apparent than real, that the only success I had had — if, indeed, this paltry accomplishment could be attributed to the analysis — was the minor one of holding my patient in treatment and keeping his condition relatively stable.

For weeks I wrestled with the problem of what to do. In rapid succession I ran through every technique, device, even trick of therapy I knew or had heard of or read about. Nightly I pored over my notes, thinking long and hard about this strange case. More and more, between the times we met for his hours, I found myself preoccupied with Kirk's analysis, and less and less with my other patients.

Readers who are unfamiliar with my previous writings will wonder here why I did not admit failure and refer Kirk elsewhere, say to a psychiatrist who might employ one of the more drastic methods such as shock treatment. This I could not do, not only because I was then and still am reluctant to admit defeat until every possible psychotherapeutic avenue has been explored,

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but because I could not conscientiously expose this patient (or, indeed, any other) either to the experience of such treatment or to its possible negative effects. I am one of the more vocal antagonists of such "heroic" measures as convulsive "therapy" and the psychosurgical methods; believing most sincerely that they violate every progressive canon of therapy and convinced they do more harm than good, either immediately or in the long run. Especially in Kirk's case would I regard the employment of such methods with abhorrence. His psychosis notwithstanding, he had a fine brain, a basically well-motivated personality, and showed promise of being — when freed from the debilitation of his disorder — one of those valuable persons on whom the future of our civilization depends. No; I could not, if there was any way to prevent it, consign him to the new kind of vegetable kingdom being created by so many of my well-intentioned but mistaken colleagues.

Why, then, it may be asked by other readers — this time readers acquainted with my work — did I not employ hypnosis? The answer to this is obvious: Kirk's hold on reality was tenuous enough as it was, and I frankly feared to break the thin thread by which his connection with this world was maintained. I cannot say for sure whether hypnosis would have had this effect, but I confess I was afraid it might.

It was during one of Kirk's hours at the time of my deepest despair over being unable to help him that I suddenly decided there remained but a single unexplored way to handle his case. In a flash of inspiration it came to me that in order to separate Kirk from his madness it was necessary for me to enter his fantasy and, from that position, to pry him loose from the psychosis.

The idea of participating in the psychosis of a patient is anything but new. Therapists have been doing it for many years, but it was such brilliant workers as John Rosen, Milton Wexler, and others who formulated the principles of the technique and described its mode of operation. Their fascinating accounts of the method had already appeared in the literature by the time I came to treat Kirk, and I had read their papers with more than usual interest. I had never utilized the method myself, but driven to it by necessity, I took the first steps toward personal involvement in the weird yet magnificent fantasy that had heretofore belonged solely to Kirk.

I began by steeping myself in the "records." For days on end, employing every spare moment, I studied the mass of material Kirk had given me until I knew it so well that the most insignificant detail was engraved in my memory. Naturally, such intensive study brought to light many inconsistencies, and it was with these that I started my new assault on Kirk's psychosis. What I did was confront him with

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an error in logic, a mistake in calculation, or a difference in description between one part of the "record" and another, and demand that he "fix" it. Often this required that Kirk make another "trip" into the future, from where he would "return" with the necessary information and, together, we would correct whatever deficiency was involved. A good example of what actually took place during our meetings is the following:

On a morning some weeks after I had begun to use the new approach, Kirk arrived at my office for his regular appointment. When he came into the room I was sitting at the desk studying the two astronomical charts and nine star maps Kirk had prepared, and the manuscript of a descriptive section of his "records" dealing with astronomical research. Since we were not using the couch in this phase of our work, he drew up a chair. For a few minutes he watched while I worked, glancing in turn at me, at the maps, and at the pad of scratch paper on which I had jotted down some figures. My silent concentration on the materials before me eventually produced — as I knew it would — sufficient tension to cause him to break the quiet.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Plenty," I replied, throwing down my pencil and lighting a cigarette. "These distances are all fouled up. Either your astronomical projection from Srom Norbra X is wrong or the star maps are way off. They just don't make sense. Look here . . ."

For the next quarter hour I reviewed an error in distance between certain suns in the fanciful galaxy where Kirk Allen's home planet was located — an error I had happily discovered the previous evening — and showed him that his maps could not possibly be correct in view of this mistake. He was very upset by this, took a pencil from his breast pocket, and made many rapid calculations on the back of one of the maps. When he finished he frowned and leaned back in his chair.

"I don't understand it," he said. "I could swear I copied those maps exactly from the originals at the Institute."

"Maybe," I suggested, "you made your mistake in translating from Olmayan measurements to miles."

He shook his head. "I doubt it," he said.

"How were the distances measured in the first place?"

"Well, until we had the Stardrive and could actually get close to some of these suns we used ordinary methods — you know, spectroscopic analysis of light and so on. But after the 'Age of Interstellar Flight' the errors were corrected by direct instrument readings."

"How are the instruments calibrated? In miles, kilometers, or what?"

"The basic unit," he said pedantically, "is the 'ecapalim,' an Olmayan word corresponding to our

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mile, actually about a mile and five sixteenths. But because of the immense distances, instruments on spaceships register in 'tonecapalim,' or units of about one hundred and sixty thousand miles." He thought awhile, then, "Here, let me see if it's just an error in translating to miles." He worked rapidly and soon covered the back of the map with numbers. I watched him closely meanwhile, admiring his mathematical facility but noting carefully his growing tension. Finally, with a grunt of disgust, he tossed his pencil on the desk and paced the room restlessly.

"That's not it," he said. "There's something fundamentally wrong."

"Well," I comforted, "it's not very serious, after all. . . ."

"Not serious!" he exploded, turning to me with anger flaring in his eyes and his face drawn into a tight mask of contempt. "Not serious! Why, man, these maps are used by my pilots. No wonder I've lost so many ships!"

"Have you lost very many?" I asked innocently.

He passed a trembling hand over his face and muttered some words I couldn't hear. Then he returned to his chair and collapsed on it like a discarded marionette. I, watching intently, felt a thrill of triumph as I realized what this episode had produced: the first small aperture in the fantasy, the first puncture in the magnificent pretense. Careful to control the eagerness in my voice, I repeated the question about the ships.

"I . . . I don't know," he faltered. "I'll have to check on it when I go back."

We sat in silence again, each of us busy with strange thoughts. I had the almost telepathic impression that Kirk's mind was a turmoil of questions about me. Heretofore, he had merely accepted my acceptance of the fantasy. Now, with his own faith in it slightly shaken and mine apparently unruffled, he was perplexed. Perceiving this, I quickly followed up my advantage.

I picked up the maps and charts from the desk and examined them closely, holding them directly under the desk light and turning each one over as if looking for something. When I felt his attention was aroused sufficiently, I asked, "You don't happen to remember when you made these, do you?"

"No," Kirk replied. "Why?"

"Well, it occurred to me you might have marked a date on them. It would have helped."

"How?"

"It's just an idea," I said casually. "I thought if they were dated you could find out when you examined the originals at the Institute."

"What good would that do?"

"Probably none," I said, "except that it's possible these maps are based on information obtained before the 'Age of Interstellar Flight.' That may be what's wrong. If you knew the dates of your visits to the Institute you could ask to be shown the stuff you saw then — I'm sure

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in a place like that they'd have a record of what you looked at."

His eyes brightened and his body tensed with alertness. "You mean," he said, "that maybe these maps are based on old ones and my pilots are using corrected charts?"

"Sure," I said. "After all, if you'd been losing many ships, you'd have heard about it long before this and the matter would have been investigated. But you just said you don't know how many vessels have been lost — which is rather odd, isn't it? So I'd suspect these are based on old stuff and your pilots have more up-to-date charts. I doubt if you'll find you've been losing ships at more than a normal rate, at least at a rate you can account for by the usual dangers of interstellar flight."

I rose to signal the end of our hour. As Kirk was about to depart he paused in the doorway, from where his eyes swept over me in a long, slow quizzical gaze. I knew then that I had, indeed, forced a slight crack in the apparently unassailable fantasy. I knew that my participation in it, the evidence I had just given of total acceptance — even of conspiracy to the extent of helping him sustain his defense when it was threatened — had, for the first time, made him question it. And on the following day, when he announced that during the night he had journeyed to Srom Olma to visit the Institute there and had found, as I predicted, that his maps were based on calculations made before the "Age of Flight," a new note was to be detected in his voice. It was, I thought, a hesitant note, lacking the old deliberateness and assurance, betraying a lessening of conviction or, perhaps, faith. Evidence that my impression was correct accumulated during subsequent days. Despite my urging, Kirk never got around to preparing new star maps. Although he declared his intention to do so, and agreed with me that the job had to be done for the sake of maintaining the completeness and correctness of the "records," he let the matter slide, putting it off with one lame excuse after another until it faded from his thoughts.

This incident reflects the pattern of my operational methods with Kirk following the decision to participate in his psychosis. While it was crucial, it is merely one of many such episodes, each of which contributed a little more leverage for prying my patient out of his madness. How it and others like it worked is probably obvious to the discerning reader. In nontechnical terms, one of the principles on which the whole performance is based can be described simply by reference to a commonplace: it is impossible for two objects to occupy the same place at the same time. It is as if a delusion such as Kirk's has room in it only for one person at one time. When, as in this case, another person invades the delusion, the original occupant finds himself forced to give way.

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Participation serves another purpose which should not be overlooked. To paraphrase the astute Dr. John N. Rosen, when the therapist engages in the same behavior as the patient — and expresses the same ideas in the same language — the patient's own image and activities are projected before him as on a screen. He is thus, in one bold maneuver, thrust to the side of reality, forced to take up a critical position vis-à-vis what he observes, i.e. his own behavior, and compelled to adopt an attitude. This attitude is soon transformed into a therapeutic tool with which the clinician now refashions the psychic structure.

But, meanwhile, strange things were happening to me, his psychoanalyst (or, better, his psychotherapist, since the method I was employing was no longer strictly that of psychoanalysis); and it is to these unforeseen personal effects — because they are, at least in retrospect, amusing and instructive — that I now wish to turn.

Kirk's case fascinated me from the very beginning. Like any other profession the practice of psychoanalysis has its share of drawbacks and dissatisfactions.

In his work, moment after moment, an analyst lives intimately with the human passions. Lust, greed, envy, hate — the seven deadly sins and more; love, charity, faith — the heavenly virtues and all the beatitudes; these assail him endlessly. While he is not to be caught up in the emotional tempest that storms about him unremittingly, it is in such an atmosphere that he must exist. One consequence of this incessant exposure must be satiety, a feeling of fullness, of overripeness, the defense against which is the antagonistic feeling of monotony. Only a "surprise," only a sudden, unpredictable event, can restore to the analyst who has reached the satiation point that quickening of interest, of zest, necessary to refresh his senses and render him once more sensitive in the way he must be if he is to perform efficiently.

Add to this satiation the enforced immobility that is the condition of work for people such as I. Everything we do takes place in the consulting room. Activity, movement, is denied to us. The great dramas of which we partake, the tremendous conflicts, the shattering experiences — these come to us, come to the rooms in which we sit and listen. Eternally, we are spectators — rather, auditors. Sometimes, it cannot be denied, one chafes against the sheer physical constriction of such a life; one longs for movement; one becomes physically restless, hungering for the air of the outdoors, for the vigorous employment of the limbs and for the distant use of eyes against horizons rather than walls. Finally, one tires of words, words, words.

I write about these conditons of psychoanalytic practice to explain

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something of the mood I was in when I made the decision to participate in Kirk's psychosis, and to account for what happened to me when I did. At that time I was in a period of emotional satiation, bored with my work, which seemed to me to be offering fewer and fewer satisfactions. I had not then the wit to comprehend that my boredom was a defense against unresolved personal conflicts, that I was drawing a defensive cloak about myself — better, placing a screen between myself and the emotional turmoil of my patients — in order to protect me from constant emotional stimulation. Moreover, I was then also restless in a physical way. Always a rather vigorous person who would rather run than walk, and provided with a body designed for activity, I contemplated the slow but progressive degeneration of flesh and muscle with angry disgust. The long hours of sitting, the stale air; the flabbiness of arms and legs, the pallid skin tones, the first suggestion of potty bulge beneath the waistline — against these and many other minor but telling symptoms of oncoming physical decrepitude I felt helpless and self-rejecting, blaming them, for want of more insight, on the implausible profession I had chosen to follow.

Yet these two contributory factors to my mood when the affair of Kirk took its unforeseen twist do not, by themselves, even begin to explain what occurred. Among others that account for my vulnerability, beyond a transient mood, there has to be mentioned my fondness for fantasy, my taste for science fiction, and certain temperamental qualities that contribute to the making of my personality.

I have always been given to an active fantasy life, to the weaving of pleasing imaginative interior romances. Without being too biographical, I can reveal that the roots of this tendency are to be discovered in a solitude during childhood comparable but not similar to Kirk's; more psychological, that is, than actual. Nor was my fantasying at all like Kirk's — obsessional, violent, and complex — but rather of the common Walter Mitty type. As a child and adolescent it offered gratifications withheld by the tedious reality of school, lessons and middle-class family life. As an adult it provided — and still does — those harmless outlets for life's ordinary frustrations that take from events their sting and that can, if employed properly, be creative. I have always delighted in this capacity for fantasying and have tried to bend it to my uses. Until the episode with Kirk, however, I had no idea what a double-edged tool it could be.

As for my taste for science fiction, I can only say that I have been, since learning to read, an *aficionado* of the genre. Introduced to *Amazing Stories* by a schoolmate, I rapidly acquired an insatiable appetite for the stuff, to the despair of my parents who regarded the dog-eared

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pulps that overflowed our bookshelves with the kind of despair with which today's parents view a similar litter of comic books. Fortunately, my literary aspirations and tastes soon directed me toward authors representing the higher reaches of the art, and my passage from BEM's through Burroughs to Wells, Heard and Stapledon was swift. At forty I remain a rather reluctant addict, fighting the temptations of Van Vogt, Bradbury, and Co., but succumbing blissfully to the irresistible appeal of a new Orwell (alas! there will be no more from him), a Wylie, or a Huxley. Parenthetically, I owe to science fiction much more than gratitude for entertainment. Reenforcing a native curiosity and an inclination toward science, such reading has led me toward the serious study of subjects like Semantics and Cybernetics, to say nothing of laying a foundation for intellectual hobbies like philosophy, higher mathematics and astrophysics.

From the moment I made its acquaintance Kirk's case, as I have said, fascinated me. The dictionary meaning of the word "fascinate" describes my state and tells the story better than I can: it means "to bewitch, to enchant, to cast a spell over, etc." This definition applies to the psychological state I soon found myself in when, as my participation in the grandiose delusion increased through the deliberate efforts I have described, the sharply defined edges of reality began to fade and I entered part way into the incredible universe of Kirk's design.

In the beginning it was a game. My wholesale acceptance of the fantasy was no more than a pretense, a device I had seized upon that promised to pry loose a disturbed mind from its adhesive clutch on a foundering life raft. But eventually it ceased to be a game, and the moves, the maneuvers, the manipulations of the pieces, passed from the hands of this player to become the tools of forces of which he was then hardly aware.

That this could have happened to me I attribute to more than the precipitating factors I have already mentioned. Beyond these, it cannot be denied that other intimate temperamental characteristics played their parts. Among them, I have only to mention two I have always known to be determinants of my personality and motivants of my behavior.

There is first to be considered that I was intrigued by the prospect Kirk's fantasy presented for the realization of my dearest wish: the wish to have sufficient time to know, to do, and to be all the wonderful things denied me and all men by temporal limitations. I possess a curiosity beyond the average, an appetite for knowing and experiencing that is almost boundless. My life does not provide sufficient scope for the satisfaction of this hunger, but the intricate fabrication woven by my patient did. With but a small

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step of an already lively imagination, I could escape from the prison of time: I could *be* geologist, explorer, astronomer, historian, physicist, adventurer and all those other enviable beings whose roles I had, at one time or another, played in my own pallid fantasies.

Then there is another charm that Kirk's extramundane delusion held for me. To an ego that has more than a modest share of a need to assert itself in creative ways, the opportunities afforded by this unique situation were tempting. While the position of "Lord of a Planet" had already been preempted, my peculiar function once I had forced my way into Kirk's romantic creation gave free play to every inventive whim, every inspiration, every demiurgic notion I ever hope to have. For as the power-behind-the-throne, the prime mover of a universe unhampered by realistic restrictions, the possibilities to exercise creativity on a grand scale were inviting beyond description.

In view of such predisposing and precipitating factors I do not find it remarkable that my engagement as a participant in Kirk's psychosis disturbed somewhat that mental equilibirum on which I have always prided myself and brought me within sight of psychological distress. We all of us possess areas of lessened resistance, and somewhere on the psychic armor of the strongest there is a vulnerable place. In this case it happened that the materials of Kirk's psychosis and the Achilles heel of my personality met and meshed like the gears of a clock.

The early signs that I had fallen under the spell of Kirk's Utopian vision and was succumbing to it were innocuous enough and hardly such as to cause concern. They consisted, by and large, of an increased interest in the details of the fantasy and a mild but persistent anxiousness about them. Unlike before, however, this interest and anxiety were not for the sake of the therapy so much as in the service of the fantasy itself.

I continued my intense pursuit of error and inconsistency in the "records," but now with the obsessive aim of "setting them straight," of "getting the facts." When I discovered mistakes, where before I would employ them solely for purposes of treatment, in this phase I gave first consideration to their correction. Nor did I, on finding them, experience the thrill of satisfaction I had felt formerly when the unearthing of error meant more ammunition in the fight against my patient's psychosis. Instead, such faults aroused anxiety in *me*, made *me* uncomfortable, and created moderately distressful symptoms which could be relieved only when the correction was made.

There were occasions, moreover, when a problem about the "records" could not be settled in discussions with Kirk. When this happened, I seemed to be compelled by rising

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anxiety to work out a solution of my own. Soon I found myself devoting spare time to calculations and speculations designed to "solve" what perplexed or bothered me. When I managed such a solution, the relief it afforded was intense. No less intense was the pleasure I took in Kirk's liberal congratulations when I presented the explanation to him as a triumph of *my* ingenuity. Often, too, when neither discussion with Kirk nor the efforts I made on my own sufficed to clarify some point, I found it "necessary" for him to obtain the required information by "journeying" to the place where it could be discovered. On occasions of this kind, assigning him the role of cosmic errand boy, I actually ordered Kirk to make these excursions into the fantasy, then discovered myself awaiting his "return" with extraordinary eagerness.

At this point I find it necessary to assure the reader that, despite the foregoing, I was not myself psychotic either during the phase I have been describing or later when these strange manifestations increased in quantity and quality. My condition throughout was, rather, that of enchantment developing toward obsession. I never lost sight of the fact that the "trips" Kirk made into a far future to a remote, nonexistent galaxy were impossible. But, in my preoccupation with the fantasy as such, I found it convenient to overlook, so far as *I* was concerned, the manner in which its wonderful details were made available to me. This is to say, I omitted from my concerns *how* Kirk collected "facts" and attended only to the "facts" themselves. That he employed the implausible vehicle of "teleportation" or some equally incredible and psychotic means to do what was required of him, I simply overlooked in my enthusiasm for the elaborate conceit.

As the days passed, however, the symptoms I have been writing about increased in number and intensity. They were all of an obsessional nature and, as such disturbances tend to do, they began to invade my thought and behavior to an ever greater degree. Whereas the fantasy and its delights had previously beckoned only when I was actually with Kirk or in spare time, it now intruded itself into moments when I was not fully engaged otherwise, and even, on occasion, when I was attending to affairs far removed from Kirk and his delusion. I found myself, for example, translating certain words, terms and names into the "Olmayan" language. Phrases in this weird tongue, unannounced and unbidden, often came into my thoughts and remained there to plague consciousness annoyingly like a haunting melody until I set them down on paper and transposed them to English. At a startlingly rapid rate, it seems, larger and larger areas of my mind were being taken over by the fantasy.

I have since questioned those who

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share my life to find out if, at the time of which I am writing, I betrayed in any way that I was prepossessed by a growing obsession. Apparently there was no change in my deportment, either toward them or in my work, for the state to which I am confessing here entirely escaped their notice. How this could have been I fail to understand, for I retain the impression of this as a time when happenings in the real world, events that would ordinarily have stimulated me, lost their appeal — of a time when I was abstracted and engrossed. The truth is that the state of calm I maintained outwardly was a false front behind which, uncannily, I was living the most exciting kind of life. With Kirk's puzzled assistance I was taking part in cosmic adventures, sharing the exhilaration of the sweeping extravaganza he had plotted.

When I recall this period now, it becomes obvious to me how I employed the rationalization of clinical altruism for personal ends and thus fell into a trap that awaits all unwary therapists of the mind. I remember clearly how, in those interim moments when I paused to ask myself what I was doing or to question the validity of my thoughts and feelings, I deliberately dismissed the evidence that I was succumbing to a fascination that could be fatal by referring my behavior to the therapeutic gambit necessitated by my patient's disorder. Today I cannot deny the fact that, in my psychic condition at the time, certain elements in the fantasy — some of which I have written about — appealed to me powerfully precisely because they fulfilled long dormant needs and desires. Then, however, because I was unaware of the strength of these desires, I fell prey to the mechanism of self-deception which was activated by the coincidental circumstance that Kirk's psychosis demanded exactly the kind of treatment I was offering.

Armed, then, with the rationalization I have described, during this brief but acute period I skirted the edges of the abyss. Although aware of the dangerous game I was playing, I seem to have been willing to play it to the limit for stakes of then unknown neurotic satisfaction. Like a swimmer who has made a wager with himself to test his endurance, it was as if I were determined to see how far I could go in order to try some unconscious conclusion with fate. Thus the game, at the height of my distraction, threatened to become a deadly one, a contest between dark forces of the mind that invited total surrender and the energies of a consciousness determined to maintain its integrity. This latter part of my mind remained, throughout, clear and analytically functional. Not only instinct with self-preservation, but experienced beyond most minds in such matters, it perceived the hazards. On it my destiny depended, for against the fascination of the fantasy that occu-

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pied the nether geography of that same mind it battled valiantly and, as it turned out, successfully.

There arrived a moment when I could not ignore the telltale signs of obsession, a moment when the ego realized the threat and allied itself witn the forces of light. This crucial time was signalized by acute psychic distress, by an exacerbation of my symptoms to the point where they became painful. It was the pain, then, that informed me of the real peril I was courting and energized the machinery of self-preservation.

To describe what happened would necessitate presenting a clinical picture of the germinal stages of the obsessional state. Since this is hardly the place for such a description, let it suffice to say that, with the passage of time, all the manifestations of obsession I have mentioned intensified. The anxiety, for example, could no longer be passed off as inner excitement: it rose to a pitch of aching apprehension where it demanded recognition. To meet this rising tide, the obsessional demands increased and, in turn, the compulsive requirements from thought and action became more exacting. Finally, the amount of my preoccupation with the fantasy, the time I had to spend on its details and the efforts I was forced to expend for its sake, enlarged to a point where other areas of my existence were invaded.

The transformation of fascination into psychic distress alarmed me sufficiently to take the necessary steps for extricating myself from this weird predicament. It acted, first, as a spur to self-analysis. Gradually, by the use of this accustomed tool, I was able to allay the more acute symptoms I have recorded and to initiate those insightful processes that lead to recovery from psychological disorder. But before I had completed this task, there occurred an amazing event which, in the space of one brief hour, not only broke what remained of the spell I was under, but marked the successful conclusion of Kirk's treatment. For it chanced that Kirk and I reversed roles and, in one of those startling dénouements that make my work the unpredictable, wonderful and rewarding pursuit it is, the folly we shared collapsed.

The scene was the same: my office, high above the noisy streets of Baltimore. Outside there was a flurry of snow that melted as the flakes touched a surface. Through its soft screen the monument at Mt. Vernon Place and, beyond, the busy harbor, had the charm of an old print. Inside it was warm and quiet. Because of the grayness of the day, all the lamps were lit and soft shadows made subdued geometric patterns on the cocoa-colored walls. At the desk, I sat, preparing for my session with Kirk by studying some drawings he had made. From the next room I could hear my secretary at her typewriter. Suddenly, to the accompaniment of a pleasant tinkle of chimes,

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the door to the hallway opened and I knew that Kirk had arrived for his hour. I was eager to see him, for on the previous day I had sent him on a "mission" and had since been awaiting his report. After an interval, I pressed the buzzer to signal him in.

Kirk entered and took his accustomed place in the chair by my desk. We grunted our usual greetings; then, without preliminary, urged by now familiar tensions, I began.

"Did you get the information?" I asked.

He nodded, and from his pocket took a leather-bound notebook which he opened and placed on the desk. Quickly I thumbed through the pages, observing with a swift sense of satisfaction that each contained a drawing and some penciled notes in Kirk's handwriting. Then I went back to the first page, extracted it from the binding, and set it beside a sketch I had already taken from the pile at my elbow. Disregarding Kirk, I gave my attention to the two papers. So absolute was my absorption in comparing the sheets and making notes that I failed to notice when Kirk left his chair and stood by the window. When I finally turned to him, intending to make some comment, I observed how he was staring down at me with an expression of concern.

"Something wrong?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "Nothing's wrong."

"Then why are you standing there? Don't you want to work on this with me?"

"Not especially."

"How come?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. . . . Just tired, I guess."

"That's odd," I commented. "This material on Olmayan ethnic types is particularly interesting. . . . Don't you find it so?"

Again he shrugged, but this time he resumed his seat.

For the next quarter hour we "worked" together; I with lively absorption, he in a desultory fashion which did not escape my notice. The situation was most unusual, for I was accustomed to much more participation from him. This morning his "heart" was not in what we were doing. He answered my questions in a dispirited way, and when I raised a point for discussion his voice and manner lacked the enthusiasm I had come to expect from him. I could not ignore the strangeness of his manner when, finally, he again left his chair and began to pace the room.

"Kirk," I said, pushing aside the litter on the desk and lighting a cigarette, "what's wrong? What's eating you this morning?"

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all."

"Then why are you so . . . restless?"

"Oh, it's just . . ." and his voice trailed off while his arms described a gesture of weary despair.

"Just what?" I urged.

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"Well . . . it's just that I've got something to tell you — and I can't seem to get it out."

"Something you haven't told me?"

He nodded.

"Something about yourself, or the work?"

"About both, I guess."

"Well," I said, "after all this time I shouldn't think you'd have any trouble telling me what's on your mind."

"I don't . . . usually. But this is different."

"Tell me anyhow," I urged.

Opposite the desk, he stopped and fixed me with anxious eyes.

"All right," he said. "I'll tell you — but you're not going to like it. . . ." Then, "I've been lying to you."

"Lying to me? What about?"

He leaned across and picked up the notebook. "About this," he said, "and this," indicating the papers on the desk, "and all the stuff I've been giving you these last few weeks. It's all a lie, all of it. I've been making it up . . . inventing all that — that — nonsense!"

I tried not to show what I was feeling, to hide the mixture of emotions that surged through me — the disappointment and the triumph, the concern and the relief. With fingers I knew were trembling, I slowly crushed my cigarette.

"You've been making it all up?" I asked.

"Yes. All of it."

"It's all false?" I asked again.

"All false!"

"Even the . . . trips?"

"Trips!" he snorted. "What trips? Why it's been weeks since I gave up that foolishness. . . ."

"But you've been telling me —"

He seated himself on the edge of his chair, his whole body rigid and his face tight with tension. "I know what I've been telling you," he said earnestly. "But, believe me, I've been pretending for a long time. There've been no trips. I saw through all of that stuff — weeks ago. . . ."

"What do you mean — you saw through?"

"Just what I said. I realized I was crazy. I realized I've been deluding myself for years; that there never have been any 'trips,' that it was all just — just insanity."

"Then why," I asked, "why did you pretend? Why did you keep on telling me . . . ?"

"Because I felt I had to," he said. "Because I felt *you wanted me to!*"

The last words echoed and re-echoed in the silent room. For many minutes I seemed to hear them.

I rose and walked to my chair behind the couch. There I seated myself and indicated to Kirk that he should lie down. When he had settled himself on it, I said, "Tell me about it, Kirk."

. . . It had not been a sudden thing, this abandonment by Kirk of his psychosis, but the result of a dawning understanding that he had begun to develop from the moment he became aware I was sharing — or

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at least appeared to share — his delusion. From that time forward it had somehow lost its potency, and the gratifications it gave him lacked their former charge of excitement. With this reduction in the appeal of the fantasy, moreover, the insights gained but not employed during the long months of our dynamic exploration of the past at last came into their own. Kirk's former ability to enter the fantasy, to achieve that abnormal state of sensitivity to his needs that had catapulted him into his mythical universe, began to diminish. It was not long before the whole amazing defense — for such Kirk now recognized his obsession to be — collapsed or, better, decayed, to be replaced, item for item, by reality.

But in these latter weeks, although discovering himself each day to be more free of the abiding delusion, Kirk, so he now told me, was still obliged to concern himself with it for the strangest of reasons. Incomprehensible though it may seem, he felt it necessary to engage in a pretense *for my sake*. My enchantment with the fantasy, my preoccupation with its details, my literal involvement in it as a sharer of its exciting gratifications — these not only puzzled him with the recovery of his reasoning capacity and the extension of his hard-won grasp on reality: they created, in addition, a real dilemma. For while *he* no longer believed in the fantasy, he thought *I* did, and such was the nature of his friendly concern for me, and his devotion, that he could not bring himself to disclose his lack of faith lest he somehow "hurt" me.

Until Kirk Allen came into my life I had never doubted my own stability. The aberations of mind, so I had always thought, were for others. Tolerant, somewhat amused, indulgent, I held to the myth of my own mental impregnability. Superior in the knowledge that I, at least, was completely sane and could not — no matter what — be shaken from my sanity, I tended to regard the foibles of my fellows, their fears, their perplexities, with what I know now to have been contempt.

I am shamed by this smugness. But now, as I listen from my chair behind the couch, I know better. I know that my chair and the couch are separated only by a thin line. I know that it is, after all, but a happier combination of accidents that determines, finally, who shall lie on that couch, and who shall sit behind it.

It has been years since I saw Kirk Allen, but I think of him often, and of the days when we roved the galaxies together. Especially do I recall Kirk on summer nights on Long Island, when the sky over Peconic Bay is bright with quivering stars. And sometimes, as I gaze above, I smile to myself and whisper:

"How goes it with the Crystopeds? . . .

"How are things in Seraneb?"

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Not all of John's ballad-stories are tales of chilling evil, of ugly birds and lonely desricks and curiously guarded gold. Happier (if no less strange) events have befallen the folk in John's hill-country; and it's one of these brighter episodes that he chooses to tell us at this season.

On the Hills and Everywhere

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

"*John, the children have opened their presents, and I want them to have some hot rations inside them before they start in on that store-bought candy you fetched them. So why don't you tell us a Christmas story while Mother's putting dinner on the table?*"

"*Be proud to do so. And this won't be any far-away tale — it happened to neighbor-folks you know.*"

YOU ALL AND I AND EVERYBODY worried our minds about Mr. Absalom Cowand and his fall-out with Mr. Troy Holcomb who neighbors with him in the hills above Rebel Creek. Too bad when old friends aren't friends any more. Especially the kind of friend Mr. Absalom can be.

You've been up to his place, I reckon. Only a man with thought in his head and bone in his back would build and work where Mr. Absalom Cowand does, in those high hills up the winding road beyond those lazy creek-bottom patches. He's terraced his fields up and up behind his house on the slope, growing some of the best-looking corn in this day and time. And nice cow-brutes in his barns, and good hogs and chickens in his pens, and money in the bank down yonder at the county seat. Mr. Absalom will feed ary hungry neighbor, or tend ary sick one, saving he's had a quarrel with them, like the quarrel with Mr. Troy Holcomb.

"*What for did they quarrel, John?*"

"*Over something Mr. Troy said wasn't so, and Mr. Absalom said was. I'll come to that.*"

That farm is Mr. Absalom's pride and delight. Mr. Troy's place next door isn't so good, though good enough. Mr. Absalom looked over to Mr. Troy's, the day I mention, and grinned in his big thicketty beard, like a king's beard in a history-book picture. If it sorrowed

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him to be out with Mr. Troy, he didn't show it. All that sorrowed him, maybe, was his boy, Little Anse — crippled ever since he'd fallen off the jolt-wagon and it ran over his legs so he couldn't walk, couldn't crawl hardly without the crutches his daddy had made for him.

It was around noon when Mr. Absalom grinned his tiger grin from his front yard over toward Mr. Troy's, then looked up to study if maybe a few clouds didn't mean weather coming. He needed rain from heaven. It wondered him if a certain somebody wasn't witching it off from his place. Witch-men are the meanest folks God ever forgot. Looking up thataway, Mr. Absalom wasn't aware of a man coming till he saw him close in sight above the road's curve, a stranger-fellow with a tool chest on his shoulder. The stranger stopped at Mr. Absalom's mail box and gave him a good day.

"And good day to you," Mr. Absalom said, stroking his beard where it bannered onto his chest. "What can I do for you?"

"It's what can I do for you," the stranger replied him back. "I had in mind that maybe there's some work here for me."

"Well," said Mr. Absalom, relishing the way the stranger looked.

He was near about as tall as Mr. Absalom's own self, but no way as thick built, nor as old. Maybe in his thirties, and neat dressed in work clothes, with brown hair combed back. He had a knowledge look in his face, but nothing secret. The shoulder that carried the tool chest was a square, strong shoulder.

"You ain't some jack-leg carpenter?" said Mr. Absalom.

"No. I learned my trade young, and I learned it right."

"That's bold spoken, friend."

"I just say that I'm skilled."

Those words sounded right and true.

"I like to get out in the country to work," the carpenter-man said on. "No job too big or too small for me to try."

"Well," said Mr. Absalom again, "so happens I've got a strange-like job needs doing."

"And no job too strange," the carpenter added.

Mr. Absalom led him around back, past the chicken run and the hog lot. A path ran there, worn years deep by folks' feet. But, some way past the house, the path was chopped off short.

Between Mr. Absalom's side yard and the next place was a ditch, not wide but deep and strong, with water tumbling down from the heights behind. Nobody could call for any plainer mark betwixt two men's places.

"See that house yonder?" Mr. Absalom pointed with his bearded chin.

"The square-log place with the shake roof? Yes, I see it."

"That's Troy Holcomb's place."

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"Yes."

"My land," and Mr. Absalom waved a thick arm to show, "terraces back off thataway, and his land terraces off the other direction. We helped each other do the terracing. We were friends."

"The path shows you were friends," said the carpenter. "The ditch shows you aren't friends any more."

"You just bet your neck we ain't friends any more," said Mr. Absalom, and his beard crawled on his jaw as he set his mouth.

"What's wrong with Troy Holcomb?" asked the carpenter.

"Oh, nothing. Nothing that a silver bullet might not fix." Mr. Absalom pointed downhill. "Look at the field below the road."

The carpenter looked. "Seems like a good piece of land. Ought to be a crop growing there."

Now Mr. Absalom's teeth twinkled through his beard, like stars through storm clouds. "A court of law gave me that field. Troy Holcomb and I both laid claim to it, but the court said I was in the right. The corn I planted was blighted to death."

"Been quite a much of blight this season," said the carpenter.

"Yes, down valley, but not up here." Mr. Absalom glittered his eyes toward the house across the ditch. "A curse was put on my field. And who'd have reason to put a curse on, from some hateful old witch-book or other; but Troy Holcomb? I told him to his face. He denied the truth of that."

"Of course he'd deny it," said the carpenter.

"Shoo, John, is Mr. Troy Holcomb a witch-man? I never heard that."

"I'm just telling what Mr. Absalom said. Well."

"If he was a foot higher, I'd have hit him on top of his head," grumbled Mr. Absalom. "We haven't spoken since. And you know what he's done?"

"He dug this ditch." The carpenter looked into the running water. "To show he doesn't want the path to join your place to his any more."

"You hit it right," snorted Mr. Absalom, like a mean horse. "Did he reckon I'd go there to beg his pardon or something? Do I look like that kind of a puppy-man?"

"Are you glad not to be friends with him?" the carpenter inquired his own question, looking at the squared-log house.

"Ain't studying about that," said Mr. Absalom. "I'm studying to match this dig-ditch job he did against me. Look yonder at that lumber."

The carpenter looked at a stack of posts, a pile of boards.

"He cut me off with a ditch. If you want work, build me a fence along this side of his ditch, from the road down there up to where my back-yard line runs." Mr. Absalom

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pointed up slope. "How long will that take you?"

The carpenter set down his tool chest and figured in his head. Then: "I could do you something to pleasure you by supper time."

"Quick as that?" Mr. Absalom looked at him sharp, for he'd reckoned the fence job might take two-three days. "You got it thought out to be a little old small piece of work, huh?"

"Nothing too big or too small for me to try," said the carpenter again. "You can say whether it suits you."

"Do what I want, and I'll pay you worth your while," Mr. Absalom granted him. "I'm heading up to my far corn patch. Before sundown I'll come look." He started away. "But it's got to suit me."

"It will," the carpenter made promise, and opened his chest.

Like any lone working man, he started out to whistle.

His whistling carried all the way to Mr. Absalom's house. And inside, on the front room couch, lay Little Anse.

You all know how Little Anse couldn't hardly stand on his poor swunk up legs, even with crutches. It was pitiful to see him scuff a crutch out, then the other, then lean on them and swing his little feet between. He'd scuff and swing again, inching along. But Little Anse didn't pity himself. He was cheerful-minded, laughing at what trifles he could find. Mr. Absalom had had him to one doctor after another, and none could bid him hope. Said Little Anse was crippled for life.

When Little Anse heard the whistling, he upped his ears to hear more. He worked his legs off the couch, and sat up and hoisted himself on his crutches. He crutched and scuffed to the door, and out in the yard, and along the path, following that tune.

It took him a time to get to where the carpenter was working. But when he got there he smiled, and the carpenter smiled back.

"Can I watch?" Little Anse asked.

"You're welcome to watch. I'm doing something here to help your daddy."

"How tall are you?" Little Anse inquired him next.

"Just exactly six feet," the carpenter replied.

"*Now wait, John, that's just foolish for the lack of sense. Ain't no mortal man on this earth exactly six feet tall.*"

"*I'm saying what the stranger said.*"

"*But the only one who was* exactly *six feet —*"

"*Hold your tater while I tell about it.*"

"I relish that song you were whistling, Mr. Carpenter," said Little Anse. "I know the words, some of them." And he sang a verse of it:

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I was a powerful sinner,
I sinned both night and day,
Until I heard the preacher,
And he taught me how to pray:

Little Anse went on with part of the chorus:

Go tell it on the mountain,
Tell it on the hills and everywhere —

"Can I help you?"

"You could hand me my tools."

"I'll be proud to."

By then they felt as good friends as if they'd been knowing each other long years. Little Anse sat by the tool chest and searched out the tools as the carpenter wanted them. There was a tale to go with each one.

Like this: "Let me have the saw."

As he used it, the carpenter would explain how, before any man knew a saw's use there was a saw-shape in the shark's mouth down in the ocean sea, with teeth lined up like a saw's teeth; which may help show why some folks claim animals were wise before folks were.

"Now give me the hammer, Little Anse."

While he pounded, the carpenter told of a nation of folks in Europe, that used to believe in somebody named Thor, who could throw his hammer across mountains and knock out thunder and lightning.

And he talked about what folks believe about wood. How some of them knock on wood, to keep off bad luck. How the ancient folks, lifetimes back, thought spirits lived in trees, good spirits in one tree and bad spirits in another. And a staff of white thorn is supposed to scare out evil.

"Are those things true, Mr. Carpenter?"

"Well, folks took them for truth once. There must be some truth in every belief, to get it started."

"An outlander stopped here once, with a prayer book. He read to me from it, about how Satan overcame because of the wood. What did he mean, Mr. Carpenter?"

"He must have meant the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden," said the carpenter. "You know how Adam and Eve ate of the tree when Satan tempted them?"

"Reckon I do," Little Anse replied him, for, with not much else to do, he'd read the Book a many times.

"There's more to that outlander's prayer," the carpenter added on. "If Satan overcame by the wood, he can also be overcome by the wood."

"That must mean another kind of tree, Mr. Carpenter."

"Yes, of course. Another kind."

Little Anse was as happy as a dog at a fish fry. It was like school, only in school you get wishing the bell would ring and turn you loose. Little Anse didn't want to be anywhere but just there, handing the tools and hearing the talk.

"How come you know so much?" he asked the carpenter.

"I travel lots in my work, Little

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Anse. That's a nice thing about it."

Little Anse looked over to Mr. Troy Holcomb's. "You know," he said, "I don't agree in my mind that Mr. Troy's a witch." He looked again. "If he had power, he'd have long ago cured my legs. He's a nice old man, for all he and my daddy fussed between themselves."

"You ever tell your daddy that?"

"He won't listen. You near-about through?"

"All through, Little Anse."

It was getting on for supper time. The carpenter packed up his tools and started with Little Anse toward the house. Moving slow, the way you do with a cripple along, they hadn't gone more than a few yards when they met Mr. Absalom.

"Finished up, are you?" asked Mr. Absalom, and looked. "Well, bless us and keep us all!" he yelled.

"Don't you call that a good bridge, daddy?" Little Anse asked.

For the carpenter had driven some posts straight up in the ditch, and spiked on others like cross timbers. On those he'd laid a bridge floor from side to side. It wasn't fancy, but it looked solid to last till the Day of Judgment, mending the cutoff of the path.

"I told you I wanted —" Mr. Absalom began to say.

He stopped. For Mr. Troy Holcomb came across the bridge.

Mr. Troy's a low-built little man, with a white hangdown moustache and a face as brown as old harness leather. He came over and stopped and put out his skinny hand, and it shook like in a wind.

"Absalom," he said, choking in his throat, "you don't know how I been wanting this chance to ask your humble pardon."

Then Mr. Absalom all of a sudden reached and took that skinny hand in his big one.

"You made me so savage mad, saying I was a witch-man," Mr. Troy said. "If you'd let me talk, I'd have told you the blight was in my downhill corn, too. It only just spared the uphill patches. You can come and look —"

"Troy, I don't need to look," Mr. Absalom made out to reply him. "Your word's as good to me as the yellow gold. I never rightly thought you did any witch-stuff, not even when I said it to you."

"I'm so dog-sorry I dug this ditch," Mr. Troy went on. "I hated it, right when I had the spade in my hand. Ain't my nature to be spiteful, Absalom."

"No, Troy. Ain't no drop of spite blood in you."

"But you built this bridge, Absalom, to show you never favored my cutting you off from me —"

Mr. Troy stopped talking, and wiped his brown face with the hand Mr. Absalom didn't have hold of.

"Troy," said Mr. Absalom, "I'm just as glad as you are about all this. But don't credit me with that bridge idea. This carpenter here, he thought it up."

"And now I'll be going," spoke

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up the carpenter in his gentle way.

They both looked on him. He'd hoisted his tool chest up on his shoulder again, and he smiled at them, and down at Little Anse. He put his hand on Little Anse's head, just half a second long.

"Fling away those crutches," he said. "You don't need them now."

All at once, Little Anse flung the crutches away, left and right. He stood up straight and strong. Fast as any boy ever ran on this earth, he ran to his daddy.

The carpenter was gone. The place he'd been at was empty.

But, looking where he'd been, they weren't frightened, the way they'd be at a haunt or devil-thing. Because they all of a sudden all three knew Who the carpenter was and how He's always with us, the way He promised in the far-back times; and how He'll do ary sort of job, if it can bring peace on earth and good will to men, among nations or just among neighbors.

It was Little Anse who remembered the whole chorus of the song—

"Shoo, John, I know that song! We sung it last night at church for Christmas Eve!"

"I know it too, John!"

"Me! Me too!"

"All right then, why don't you children join in and help me sing it?"

Go tell it on the mountain,
Tell it on the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ was born!

Coming Next Month

The next issue of F&SF, on the stands around the first of the year, will contain all new stories — no reprints — and will feature a surprising number of "firsts": the first appearance (at long last!) in F&SF of novelist-anthologist Frederik Pohl, with a typical ironic and detailed creation of a future civilization; the first story in an American fantasy-magazine by C. S. Lewis, distinguished English theologist and creator of such science fiction classics as OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET; the first fantasy by the rising writer (of *Collier's*, *Harper's* and TV), Rachel Maddux; and the first of, I hope, many articles written for F&SF by L. Sprague de Camp, this one analyzing the truth behind the Rosicrucian claims you see so regularly in advertisements. In addition to these and stories by Damon Knight, Winona McClintic and other favorites, there'll be a short novel, complete in one issue, by James Blish: *A Time to Survive*, with Blish's characteristic blend of stimulating thought and vivid adventure.

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

READERS OF SCIENCE FICTION HAVE become accustomed to welcoming annually, as among the few justified anthologies of the year, two collections by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty: one of "novels" (i.e., short novels and novelets), the other of short stories.

But this year we get only one collection, by only one editor: THE BEST SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES AND NOVELS: 1955, edited by T. E. Dikty (Fell, $4.50*); and I'm afraid the welcome, at least in this department, is less warm than usual.

The volume contains two "novels" (both from *Astounding*) and 18 shorter stories (6 from F&SF, 3 from *Galaxy*, 2 each from *Astounding* and *Amazing*, and the rest scattered). All this bulks to about the wordage of three issues of this magazine; and at least one issue's worth is excellent: a notable Simak *reductio ad absurdum* of the do-it-yourself trend (*Galaxy*), a fine Chad Oliver essay in interstellar anthropology in which s.f.'s anthropology specialist veers delightfully toward self-parody (*Astounding*), a wondrous Ward Moore satire on Mars and the British Empire (*Saturday Evening Post*), two strikingly memorable Robert Abernathy stories (F&SF), and an amusing bit of tomfoolery by Winston Marks (*Imagination*).

But a badly balanced issue this group would make, since all of them save the Abernathys are, in varying degrees, humorous or satiric. Dikty-without-Bleiler seems to do admirably in choosing the year's wittier highpoints; but the more serious, basic s.f. in the volume is too often badly flawed — stories padded far beyond the length they will sustain, stories with no story-line, stories based upon ancient clichés (there's even a perfectly earnest Mad Scientist opus) or fundamental illogic.

In addition to the 20 stories, the book contains "The Science-Fiction Book Index" by Earl Kemp and a survey of "The Science-Fiction Year" by Mr. Dikty. The Kemp index is as certainly useful as it is certainly not science fiction. It includes every book remotely verging on any type of fantasy published in the U. S., England or Canada during 1954; and its only drawbacks are the confusion of classification and the absence of any clear distinction between original and reprint editions. The Dikty survey is a cheery and somewhat meaningless

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omnium gatherum intended to demonstrate that s.f. is wildly flourishing despite the assertions of "some critics" (which I suppose includes me).

It's nice that Mr. D. feels so happy; but I'd like to know where, in the sacred name of Space itself, he gets the prosperous statistic of "268 fiction titles (books)" for s.f. in 1954. The wildly comprehensive Kemp index, of which so much is not anywhere near s.f., lists 345 titles of which 169 are reprints, leaving 125 new titles published in the U. S., plus 51 more in England or Canada. My own records show that in 1954 there appeared in the U. S. 55 new s.f. titles in hard covers and 19 in paper, for a total of 74. This sum, naturally, may be a little off; but hardly by so much as the gap between 74 and 268!

In almost the same mail as the Dikty BEST arrived a release from Dell First Editions announcing the publication, in the Spring of 1956, of the first in a series of annual collections, titled S-F: THE YEAR'S BEST and edited by Judith Merril. Readers of this column know that I rank Miss Merril easily first among tasteful anthologists; her invasion of the BEST field should be rewarding in itself and, if competition has the virtues generally attributed to it, may well stimulate Dikty into producing a more consistently satisfactory collection next year.

Like 1954, 1955 has not been an outstanding year for s.f. novels. In the earlier part of the year, only two British entries — Clarke's EARTHLIGHT and Wyndham's REBIRTH — belonged in the first rank; but now we can set two American titles beside them, both examples of familiar themes revivified by literary skill and intelligent thinking-through of problems.

There have been a number of novels on a future Russian occupation of the United States, written with no knowledge of the Russian language, culture or psychology — and for that matter, with very little knowledge of the American. In NOT THIS AUGUST (Doubleday, $2.95*), C. M. Kornbluth achieves the first adequate treatment of the theme, in a far more than adequate novel. Kornbluth has hardly a peer in the writing of vigorous, exciting and *credible* melodrama, or in fusing a thriller with a more meaningful novel of character. All of these virtues are bounteously on display here; and the result is not to be missed.

Leigh Brackett's THE LONG TOMORROW (Doubleday, $2.95*) conceives of a decentralized U. S. after an A-war, in which pathological (if not wholly unjustified) fear of cities and technology has led to the dominance of fanatic and eccentric religious sects. Readers of her rare realistic short stories (such as *The Tweener*, F&SF, February, 1955) know that Miss Brackett is potentially much more than the undisputed Queen of Space Opera; and in this novel she at last realizes her

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full potentials. Through the story of a youth's quest for a legendary surviving haven of pre-war technology and science, she tells far more than a tale of adventure (though it's that, too); she studies the manifestations, false and true, of the religious impulse with an honest care almost unique in s.f., and she creates living, breathing people of multi-dimensional complexity — in short, she accomplishes one of the best jobs to date in fusing intelligent extrapolation with the literary quality of the mainstream novel.

Some other recent novels are worth your looking into, even if they fall below the level of these two. Isaac Asimov's THE END OF ETERNITY (Doubleday, $2.95*) is about . . . Well, I was recently on a radio interview program with Mr. Asimov in which he tried to explain, in a few words, just what it is about, and the American radio audience has never been so thoroughly baffled. Let's just say that it is the Ultimate Time Paradox Novel, so vast and complex that it will delight the old-line specialist as completely as it will confound the average reader. In REPRIEVE FROM PARADISE (Gnome, $3*), H. Chandler Elliott proves himself a newcomer of great promise, who understands the Heinleinesque method of creating a civilization by detailed thinking-through of all its scientific and social implications. This is not a bad novel — and I'm sure it will be followed by far better ones as Elliott learns to use less wordage and more original plots. J. T. McIntosh's THE FITTEST (Doubleday, $2.95*) tells of a world overrun by paggets, superanimals mutated from a misguided experiment. The intimate human side of the story is as warmly readable as one expects of this young Scot; but the broader picture lacks the cohesive, cumulative details with which John Wyndham can make world catastrophe convincing. (Indeed, I think Arthur Porges lent more conviction to the mutant theme in his often-reprinted short story *The Rats* than McIntosh does here at 22 times the length.) Sam Merwin, Jr.'s THREE FACES OF TIME (Ace, 35c) is a sequel to 1951's THE HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS — another espionage-adventure in multiple universes, this time chiefly in one in which the decadence of First Century Rome is flourishing lustily in the Twentieth Century. It's rough and none too plausible, but lively, sexy and amusing; the same Ace Double-Book includes a reprint of Andre Norton's admirable 1954 THE STARS ARE OURS! And though it's at best marginal to s.f., you shouldn't miss a first-rate spy-thriller by Edward S. Aarons, ASSIGNMENT TO DISASTER (Gold Medal, 25c), which ends (in another alternate universe?) with the launching of our first orbital satellite on July 4, 1955.

Other novels: Richard Wilson's THE GIRLS FROM PLANET 5 (Ballantine, $2*; paper, 35c) comes close to being delightful, with its enter-

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taining notion of a matriarchal U. S. invaded by interstellar Amazons, none of whom falls below the standard of splendor of the Copacabana line. But Mr. Wilson seems unable to sustain the light touch for a long book, and too often falls back into routine invasion-opera; further marred by some fairly heavy-handed male chauvinism. Still a good deal of fun, though . . . in spots. In VALLEY BEYOND TIME (St. Martin's, $3*), the usually enjoyable romantic novelist Vaughan Wilkins switches to an unfortunate attempt at science fiction — tangential universe stuff, loosely plotted, improbably characterized, with only rare glints of the author's charm and storytelling skill. Richard Holden's SNOW FURY (Dodd, Mead, $3*) is agreeably written, with good descriptions both of ordinary New Hampshire life and of the menace of a "living" snow; but its plot is the hopelessly antiquated business of the Mad Scientist with the beautiful daughter. Jerry Sohl's POINT ULTIMATE (Rinehart, $2.75*) is another of the inadequate Russian-occupation-of-U. S. books mentioned above; though superficial, it's a readably fast chase-adventure up to an ending which sets a possible new high in nonsensical incredibility. Philip Wilding's SPACEFLIGHT VENUS (Philosophical Library, $2.75*) is interesting solely as evidence that England, if it produces Clarke and Wyndham, can still export cruder trash than anything normally deemed publishable in this country. (One other distinction I should, in fairness, note: It's the first s.f. novel to make any serious effort to appeal to high-heel fetichists.)

Edson McCann's PREFERRED RISK (Simon & Schuster, $2.75*) deserves a separate paragraph only because it is the much-publicized winner of the Simon & Schuster-*Galaxy* $6500 contest. This contest was announced well over two years before the novel began its serialization in *Galaxy;* and expectations were naturally high — a check of such spectacular size (and what author would bother to read the fine print as to what rights it covered?) should call forth the best manuscripts in the country. But PREFERRED RISK, though certainly publishable and readable, falls far short of representing modern American s.f. at its best. It's a faithfully calculated imitation of the excellent Pohl-Kornbluth *Galaxy* serials in which advertising men or corporation lawyers have Taken Over Civilization. This time it's insurance actuaries; and the pattern of plotting and extrapolation is followed sedulously — save that Mr. McCann (and the contest judges) failed to observe that the Pohl-Kornbluth novels are grounded on solid characterization, scientific plausibility and genuine satiric perception . . . all qualities markedly lacking in this pastiche.

Only one "pure" fantasy novel has appeared recently, but that single specimen is a sheer delight. Man-

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ning Coles's HAPPY RETURNS (Doubleday, $3*) is a sequel to last year's BRIEF CANDLES, relating further episodic adventures in contemporary France of James and Charles Latimer, who perished in the Franco-Prussian War. Mr. Coles makes up his own rules for haunting (some of which may surprise the Society for Psychic Research), but like every good fantast, he sticks by them once they're made. Few funnier fantasy notions have been conceived than that of having genuine ghosts masquerade as poltergeists; and the remaining episodes are comparable. Blither spirits never were, and I look forward to many more returns.

Outstanding among recent books of short stories (and let's extend "recent" to cover a stretch of several years) is Chad Oliver's ANOTHER KIND (Ballantine, $2*; paper, 35c). I referred above to Oliver's specialization in the science fiction of anthropology, which you know from his fine novel SHADOWS IN THE SUN and such short stories as *Artifact* (F&SF, June, 1955). In this new collection you'll find *Artifact* and four other magazine stories (notably the *Astounding* novelet, *Rite of Passage*), all for the first time in book form, plus a short story and a grand long novelet written especially for this volume — all on anthropological themes, but nicely balanced and contrasted and adding up to evidence that Oliver is a prime contender for the Heinlein-Clarke front rank of genuine science fiction, in which the science is as accurately absorbing as the fiction is richly human.

By contrast, Roger Lee Vernon's THE SPACE FRONTIERS (Signet, 25c) is as hopelessly weak in both departments as you can imagine. Why any publisher should bring out a collection of unpublished banalities by an unknown author passes comprehension; any magazine editor could assemble at least as good a volume by grabbing nine manuscripts at random from the slush-pile.

While we're on short stories, I might note — quite uncritically — that my own collection FAR AND AWAY, originally available only in a newsstand edition, has now appeared in hard covers (Ballantine, $2*).

The most rewarding recent nonfiction for s.f. readers is Milton W. Rosen's THE VIKING ROCKET STORY (Harper, $3.75*), an intensively detailed play-by-play account of every step in the firing of the Navy's Vikings from 1 (May 3, 1949) to 10 (May 7, 1954), with briefer notes bringing the reader up through February, 1955. Its appeal is by no means limited to the rocket aficionados, to whom of course it is an essential book; the least technology-minded general reader will find that Rosen, the scientific officer in charge of development of the Viking, has a surprising gift for vivid narrative, great clarity and even acute characterization of his colleagues.

Roland Gelatt's THE FABULOUS

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PHONOGRAPH (Lippincott, $4.95*) may seem to have no business in these columns; it's a straightforward history of the phonograph from Edison's first cylinders to today's HiFi-jinks. But it's strongly commended to s.f. readers, and particularly to writers, as a brilliant study in the social and cultural effects of a scientific invention — a model for the modern school of s.f. which stresses not the incident of discovery but its repercussions upon the world we live in.

Ralph Izzard's THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN (Doubleday, $4*), is the story of the London *Daily Mail's* 1954 Himalayan Expedition in quest of the elusive Yeti, and recounts in great detail precisely how the Expedition succeeded in not finding any Snowmen. Much of this narrative is inevitably inconclusive and even tedious; but the book does bring together in one place more well-documented material on possibly authentic Yeti-sightings than is readily available elsewhere. MYSTERIOUS PSYCHIC PHENOMENA (Christopher, $3*) is disappointing from such a scholar as Hereward Carrington; the author has chosen to address himself to the absolute novice who has not so much as heard of paranormal phenomena, and the book contains little of interest (aside from a shrewd section of advice on "How to Go to a Medium") for those who have indulged in even the sketchiest reading on the subject.

Note for collector-enthusiasts: Stuart S. Hoffman has brought out AN INDEX TO UNKNOWN AND UNKNOWN WORLDS (Sirius Press, $1), which may be ordered from the editor at Box 13, Black Earth, Wisconsin. The basic material is of course contained in the invaluable Day INDEX; but Mr. Hoffman has added brief notes on the content of the stories, a cross-index by names of leading characters, and a wonderfully glowing (and just) tribute to *Unknown* and to its editor John Campbell by Robert Bloch. The same Mr. Bloch and Bob [Wilson] Tucker have become editors of s.f.'s first professional fan-magazine, *The Science-Fiction World*, a house organ of Gnome Press intended to introduce the general reader to the strange delights of s.f. fandom. The editors, both equally renowned as professionals and as fans, could not have been better chosen; the first issue is a highly pleasing mélange of editorial comment, book reviews, fiction and gossip (both fan and pro); and I urge you to ask Gnome (80 E. 11th St., New York 3) to put you on the mailing list for this and subsequent numbers.

* Books marked with an asterisk may be obtained through F&SF's Readers' Book Service; see page 128.

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Very nearly every day of the year this office turns down a Pact-with-the-Devil story; but only on alternate 31sts of February do we find a Satanic compact worked out with such humor and such pure Unknown*-type fantasy logic as Theodore Cogswell brings to* Threesie. *"I love the Pact-with-the-Devil," Cogswell writes, "simply because it* is *such an oldie that — like the locked room and the time paradox — technically it's a lot of fun to try to work out a new twist. If some day I can successfully combine solutions to all three in one short, I'll die happy." That will be a story which F&SF* must *print, even at the cost of running a Cogswell obit in the same issue; meanwhile, here's a wholly fresh new answer to one third of the paradoxic trinity.*

Threesie

by THEODORE R. COGSWELL

THERE IS AN EVIL IN THIRDS THAT Joseph Cruthers should have recognized: the third on a match, the swimmer going down for the third time, the crowd instead of the company, the strike that makes an out, the violence implicit in the eternal triangle. If he had been satisfied with two, things might have worked out differently; but Joseph Cruthers fancied himself a shrewd operator. At the moment he was operating shrewdly in the area of the supernatural.

The girl at the classified ad desk read through the text of the slip he had handed her, yawned, and then asked for a dollar and twenty-seven cents.

"You're sure it will be in tomorrow morning's paper?" asked Joseph anxiously.

The girl gave a bored nod. "Just look under 'Miscellaneous for Sale.'"

"Thanks," he said, started to turn, and then swung back suddenly in a perfect double take. "Hey, wait a minute. I wanted that in the 'Personal Column.' In fact it has to be. I don't think the party I am trying to contact is interested in bargains in used refrigerators."

"Sorry." She didn't sound sorry. "Ya got something you want to sell, it ain't real estate, automotive, or live stock, it goes in 'Miscellaneous for Sale.' That's the policy of the paper. Me, I just work here."

Joseph started to argue but stopped when he saw he wasn't getting any-

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where. "Look," he said finally, "if I get it right, all that you are objecting to are the words 'For Sale.' Am I correct?"

"Keerect. Ya got something for sale, it ain't real estate, automotive, or —"

"All right, all right," interrupted Joseph hastily. "So I strike out 'For Sale.' Now can it go into personals?

She picked up the slip of paper and read through it again. " 'Soul in good condition available at usual terms. Box 379.' Sure, that'll go. Like I said, mister, I just work here. The boss tells me, 'Myrtle, ya get an ad that wants to sell something that ain't real estate, automotive . . .' "

Joseph had to renew the ad six times before he finally got a reply. An envelope was forwarded to him by the newspaper that contained nothing but a slip of paper with a telephone number on it. Hardly able to believe that he had made contact at last, he rushed to the telephone and dialed. At the third ring he heard the receiver lift at the other end and a harsh voice answer.

"Yeah?"

Joseph had trouble making his vocal chords operate. "I was told to call this number," he said huskily.

"Who told ya?"

"I had an advertisement in the paper and this morning a letter came with a telephone number in it. I naturally assumed —"

"Hold it," interrupted the other. His voice dimmed as he turned away from the phone to call to somebody else.

"Hey, Mac, you send out our number to some creep who had an ad in the paper? You did? OK." There was silence for a minute and then the sound of a typewriter clicking. At last the voice returned.

"What church ya go to?"

"To tell the truth," said Joseph diffidently, "I haven't been in one for years. I suppose you could call me a nominal agnostic."

"Age?"

"Thirty-seven."

"Hold the phone. . . . Hey, Mac, what's the book price on a thirty-seven agnostic?"

Joseph strained his ears to catch the reply but all he got was an indistinct mumble.

"The boss says your model is a drug on the market," said the voice at the other end. "He wants to know if maybe you'd like to make a swap. What you got would make a good down payment on a one-owner job that came in this morning. It belonged to a retired minister and never received anything but the best of care."

"Listen," said Joseph plaintively, "you do *buy* souls, don't you?"

The man at the other end sounded surprised. "Why, sure . . . If the price is right, that is," he added hastily. "But you're in a buyer's market and you might as well face it. What's your asking price?"

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Joseph took a deep breath, hesitated, and then took the plunge. "Three wishes. I believe that's the usual limit, isn't it?"

There was a snort and then a side comment that Joseph couldn't help overhearing. "Hey, Mac, guess what? Another threesie!"

"I beg your pardon?" said Joseph.

"What for? Come on over. The boss says it's a deal."

Joseph jotted down the building and office number on the back of a match folder and set off to meet his destiny.

The beetle-browed man didn't bother to introduce himself but the name on the door said J. CUTLER. He pulled a thick sheaf of forms out of his desk drawer and tossed it over to Joseph.

"The usual contract," he said. "You might as well start filling in the blanks."

Joseph, who had expected a single sheet of hand-illuminated parchment, was momentarily appalled at the multiplicity of divers colored forms. He leafed through them timidly. There were eleven green ones, eight white ones, twelve blue ones, and three of pale magenta.

"I have to fill out all of these, Mr. Cutler?"

The other nodded.

"In my own blood?" asked Joseph apprehensively. After making a quick estimate of the number of blanks to be filled he doubted whether he had that much.

"Naw, we got rid of all that nonsense during the last re-organization. It wasn't our idea to begin with. Back in the middle ages unless they had a lot of fuss and flurry they didn't feel they were getting their money's worth. Then once the tradition got established it sort of hung on. But when you look at it from a common-sense point of view, what do coagulated red corpuscles have to do with whether a deal's a deal?"

"I don't know . . ." said Joseph. "Sometimes I wonder what filling out forms in thirty-four-plicate has to do with it."

The big man looked at him shrewdly. "Maybe you're the type we used to get didn't think so much of the blood either. But you gotta satisfy the average customer. When he thinks blood works magic, he gets blood. When he thinks forms . . ." He took out a cheap ballpoint pen and tossed it on the table. "You can use that desk over there," he said. "Let me know when you're finished."

Joseph obediently carried the stack of printed forms to the other side of the office, sat down, and began busily filling in the indicated blanks. An hour went by, and then another.

"Excuse me," he said.

The big man looked up from his racing form. "Yeah?" he grunted.

"Question ninety-seven has me sort of confused."

"Why?"

"When it asks for the date and place of my grandfather's marriage,

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it doesn't say which one it's referring to."

"Which what? Marriage or grandfather?"

"Grandfather."

"Is that on the blue sheet?"

Joseph checked and then nodded.

"Then it's asking about your father's father. The other side of the family is covered on the green sheets."

Joseph made a quick estimate of the forms that were as yet unfilled and ventured a timid objection.

"Those questions about when I first decided to kill my father and marry my mother — are they really necessary? I mean, after all, I've got something you want and you've got something I want. Couldn't we make a simple exchange and call it a day?"

"Look," said Cutler sternly. "You're in a business this big, the home office has to keep in touch, see? It's got to be able to get the big picture. To get the big picture you've got to have reports to consolidate, lots of reports." He frowned sternly at Joseph. "If you don't want to cooperate, beat it. Losing your crumby little soul ain't going to bankrupt *us*."

Joseph was filled with sudden alarm and held up his hands placatingly. "Please don't misunderstand me. I wasn't criticizing, I was just curious, that's all." Bending back over the forms he began to scribble hurriedly.

An hour and a half later he stumbled across the room to Cutler's desk with every single blank completed and his name written neatly at the bottom of each. The fingers of his right hand were gnarled and twisted with writer's cramp, but he didn't care. It was done. At last it was done.

"I hadn't realized this would be such a complicated business," he said as he laid down the pile of paper with a sigh. "None of the old books made any mention of this sort of thing."

"It was simpler in the old days," admitted the beetle-browed man. "But terribly inefficient," he added hastily as he began a quick check to see that all the question blanks were filled in. "We've got a big statistical analysis section now and all the central records sections have been converted to IBM. Like the Old Man says, we gotta keep up with the times."

Joseph stole a surreptitious look at the big electric clock on the wall, but he couldn't make any sense out of it. There was an infinity sign at the top where the 12 should have been and the spacing suggested some sort of a geometrical progression.

"It must be getting rather late," he said. "If you don't mind, I'd appreciate it if —"

The big man obviously didn't like being interrupted. "Like I was saying," he said severely, "we gotta keep up with the times. About the only job we haven't been able to

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mechanize is de-souling. That's such a tricky job it still has to be handled in the old way."

"De-what?" said Joseph.

"De-souling. You sold us your soul. Now it's up to us to get it out of you."

"How?"

"Stick around. You'll find out," said the other with a nasty grin.

Joseph found himself filled with a sudden sense of malaise. "It doesn't hurt, does it?" he asked apprehensively.

There was no answer.

Joseph let out a nervous smile and started to edge toward the door. "I'm a little tired from all that name signing. Suppose I drop back tomorrow to finish up the rest?"

The big man jumped up with an ugly growl. "Oh, no, you don't! It's the collection station for you!"

Before Joseph could escape — or even protest, for that matter — he was seized by the scruff of the neck and propelled toward a small door that had suddenly opened in the opposite wall. As they approached it, a little gnome-like figure popped out and stood rubbing his hands. He wore a pair of blood-stained coveralls, and over his shoulder Joseph saw a long wooden table with rusty arm and leg clamps attached to it. Above the table was a rack containing an extensive array of both blunt and pointed objects. He tried to twist out of the big man's grip, but he couldn't. So he did the next best thing: he fainted.

When he came to, there was the sharp sting of smelling salts in his nose and he found himself securely strapped to the table. The attendant in the once-white jacket was testing the point of a particularly ugly knife on his thumb. A little drop of emerald blood oozed forth and he grunted his satisfaction.

"Just relax," he said in a conversational tone. "This won't take more than a couple of hours. A soul's a mighty hard thing to get out — it's all mixed up with blood and bone and muscle — but in me you've got the best de-souler in the business. There's some as need five hundred incisions to get the job done. Me, I usually don't run over three hundred and fifty."

The little man must have had an off day. He ran considerably over par before he finally obtained what had to be obtained, smeared Joseph with an evil-smelling salve that healed all his cuts the minute it touched them, and shoved him out the little door into the office.

"My wishes!" croaked Joseph to the beetle-browed man when he was finally able to talk again.

"Go ahead and make them. I ain't got all day."

Joseph's head whirled and there was a sudden weakness that made it difficult for him to stand up. It was finally past. If he had had any inkling of the horror that waited for him in the de-souling room when he first got the idea of selling his soul, he would never have had the

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courage to go through with it. But that was all over now. The pain was behind him. Now it was his turn.

"First, wealth!" he snapped.

Mr. Cutler reached in his desk drawer, took a bank book off the top of a large pile, and handed it over.

"Is a million bucks enough to start with?"

Joseph's eyes bugged slightly but he attempted a nonchalant gesture as he tucked the little book away in his breast pocket.

"Next, immortality."

This time instead of a book he received a pill. He gulped it down, ignoring a slightly bitter taste as he did so. A moment later he felt a slight tingling sensation, but that was all.

"When does it start to work?" he asked anxiously.

"It already has," said Cutler. "You're immortal. That's what you wanted, isn't it?"

Joseph nodded mutely.

"All right then, what's your third? Like you said, it's getting late; and there ain't no overtime paid on this job."

This was Joseph's moment of triumph. He drew himself up to his full five feet four and said slowly, "My third wish is for three more wishes."

Mr. Cutler's reaction was all that Joseph could have asked for. He swore, he beat with both fists on his desk, he stamped up and down the office. When that didn't work, he recaptured control of himself with an effort and said in a panicky voice, "I don't think you realize what you're asking!"

"I am perfectly aware of what I'm asking," said Joseph coldly.

"But one soul — especially one in the condition yours is in — just isn't worth the energy expenditure required. We'd have to go way in the red on the deal. Suppose we settle on making you the handsomest man in the world and call it square."

Joseph was adamant. "I've got a contract. It's down in black and white that I can ask for anything I want to. So I'm asking."

"But look at it from our point of view," said Cutler in a plaintive voice. "On three wishes we just about break even. And if we didn't have a volume business we wouldn't even do that. What you're asking is an infinite number of free throws, because every time you use up two wishes, you'll use your third to get three more."

Joseph was beginning to enjoy himself. For the first time in his life he found himself really in command of an important situation. "Admitted," he said smugly. "The next time you sign something, I suggest you read all the fine print." His voice sharpened and he slapped his hand down on Cutler's desk.

"Either you pay off — now! — or I'm going to take this up with higher authorities."

Cutler winced. "But to adjust your probability path to infinite

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reduplication would require a terrific wrenching of the continuum—"

"You refuse to honor this contract?" interrupted Joseph.

The beetle-browed man stuttered to a stop, glared wildly at the other, and then finally threw up his hands in defeat. "All right," he muttered. "Three more wishes you want, three more wishes you'll get. But the front office ain't going to like it when they see this month's cost sheet." He pushed a button on the intercom on his desk and spoke into it.

"Yeah?" creaked a rusty voice.

"Trouble, Mac."

"What kind?"

"I got a threesie who insists on using his last wish to get three more. What'll I do?"

"The contract signed already?"

"Yeah. And he's holding us to it."

There was a groan from the other end. "And just when it looked like we were going to end up in the black."

"What'll we do?" asked Cutler.

There was silence at the other end, and then finally: "Guess he's got us over a barrel. There's nothing the competition would like better than to catch us welshing on a contract. When does he want delivery?"

"Now!" broke in Joseph.

"Well, if we got to, we got to. Here goes!"

Joseph waited triumphantly — a song in his heart, a chip on his shoulder, and the world at his feet.

When it happened there was a sudden twisting all around him and he went spinning down into darkness. When the lights went on again, he — or at least a conscious immaterial part of him — was sitting in a murky place, feeling but not felt, and looking out through a familiar pair of male eyes and listening to a familiar bored female voice.

Technically the terms of his contract had not been violated. To satisfy his last demand, his particular path through the space-time continuum had been turned back on itself until a perfect Möbius strip was formed and Joseph found himself suddenly tossed back a week in time. His third wish had been granted; he was getting three more.

Ahead of him was the waiting, and then the agony of the de-souling room, and then finally the insistence on the third wish that would throw him back to begin the whole horrible cycle again as the bored voice said, "Ya got something to sell, it ain't real estate, automotive . . ."

He wanted to scream but he heard himself say anxiously, "You're sure that it will be in tomorrow's paper?"

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In the last issue, F&SF reprinted Dr. Robert S. Richardson's article on the exploration of Mars, with its thought-provoking comments on the sexual problems of extraterrestrial outposts. By one of those coincidences so common among writers that they deserve the attention of Dr. Rhine, before Dr. Richardson's article was written Paul Carter had completed the first draft of this novelet, treating the same hitherto-unrecognized fact that "there are a few things you can't stop human beings from doing." But Mr. Carter — a too infrequent writer of science fiction who devotes most of his time to the teaching of history, at Columbia, at Cornell, and currently at the University of Maryland — posits an even more stringent situation, in which Dr. Richardson's answer can serve only as a temporary measure; and General Moses Parke, in command of Operation Noah, must solve a sexual dilemma affecting the very survival of the human race itself.

[Rueful note: The last time we published a Carter story, McComas and I somehow managed to rechristen the author Philip. I apologize, and hereby reassure you that this is the same Carter who wrote that fiendish time-twist, Ounce of Prevention (F&SF, Summer, 1950).]

Unbalanced Equation

by PAUL A. CARTER

THE END OF THE WORLD, WHEN IT came, was almost an anticlimax. Even as near as the Moon, there was not much to see — a few searingly bright flashes that winked across the night side of the planet before clouds came up and hid everything.

General Moses Parke, commanding the United States Armed Forces on the Moon, stared fascinated at the Earth's image on the television screen, as if trying to pierce the dirty brown clouds with his pale blue eyes. "Damn," he muttered, over and over. It was more a prayer than a curse.

A light winked on the switchboard beside the big screen. Eldred, the general's aide, fingered a switch and plugged in a phone jack. The smaller screen in front of him lighted up with the thin and haggard face of Colonel Weatherbee, the bombardment officer.

"Sir, it seems to be checkmate

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down there." Weatherbee's voice was tinny on the military audio. "Don't you want us to stop —"

"Continue launching until you have no more projectiles left," Parke ordered brusquely. The colonel swallowed and saluted.

Eldred cleared the screen. Then, hesitantly: "Pardon my presumption, general — but I don't understand. What good is there" — his voice rose a little as he waved at the image of the cloud-stained Earth — "in keeping up the firing when both sides are obviously—" Abruptly, he was unable to finish.

Parke spoke gently. " 'Obviously' is a dangerous word, Mr. Eldred. From here it would appear that we on the Moon are all that's left of the human race. But if we're wrong — if some group in the Urals or the Gobi Desert hangs on just long enough to patch up a revenge missile — then there won't be *anybody* left."

Eldred was silent, the enormity of this decision sinking in. Then, in a low voice: "The enemy's lunar base —"

"Got them with the first rocket," Parke said. "If we hadn't, we'd be riding out of this crater on a cloud."

It was the right decision, he thought, bleakly. *Was it?* Cities, factories, libraries, laboratories, cathedrals, and all the millions and millions down there, traded for a base on the Moon with the population of a small town —

— and Project Noah.

Coincidence is part of the living stuff of history. Coincidence that Wolfe was killed on the Plains of Abraham — and so did not live into his prime to hurl his military brilliance against a colonial officer named Washington. Coincidence that a frontier ne'er-do-well survived cold and hunger and Indians — and so in 1809 fathered Abraham Lincoln.

Coincidence that man was very nearly ready for a try at colonizing another world when Armageddon fell upon him —

Or was it?

Was there once more to be a saving remnant in Israel?

The home planet looked down at the domes on the crater floor. Earth's face was almost normal, now. The dust had settled. The ocean's color had returned and the snowfields flashed white. But the continent's familiar school-atlas lines enclosed no green.

Some day that, too, would be as it had been. Life had come out of the sea once before, and it could come again. But that day was too far into the future even for dreaming.

In the long meanwhile, the dead planet was too close, and there was work to be done.

Men talked a little of abandoning Project Noah and remaining on the Moon. But the talk died. Arguments were found for going through with the Project: meteors, radiation, the possibility of being found out

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by a stray missile from the One Day's War. The real reason they never mentioned: that reproachful dead disk in the lunar sky, perpetually reminding them of the incredible act in which they had all shared. Better for them all if the mother planet dwindled to a blue spark among the stars . . .

So the two-week lunar days passed, and the shops worked round the old twenty-four-hour clock, and on the appointed hour the vast bulk of *Noah's Ark* — they could have given it no other name — rose on a column of soundless white fire out of the crater and launched herself outward bound for Mars.

There were, inevitably, speeches. There was an old tape-recording of Winston Churchill reading Longfellow's "Sail On, O Ship of State." There were pep-talks, warnings, prayers. And there was a wild party that began in the ship's sick bay with medicinal alcohol and raged through the compartments and corridors. The Marines arrested one or two who wanted to fight and saw to it that the duty section of the ship's company stayed sober. Otherwise they let matters broil on. Too many people had too much to forget.

Later there were quieter parties — amateur and talent shows, whose m. c. announced the contestants with awe as "the only barbershop quartet in the world" or "the only violinist in the world." The Catholic chaplain held a solemn *Te Deum* — the most solemn in history — and everyone, even the unreconstructed atheists, attended. Later the Jewish chaplain arranged for High Holy Day services — it happened to be Yom Kippur — and everyone attended that, too. Traditional barriers fell in the unity of the world's shipwreck, and of man's newest morale-slogan: "We're It."

The chaplains were busy in other ways, too.

Marriages.

A few had taken place even while the numbness of world-death hung over the Moon. Now, with the ship launched and in the psychological lift of adventure, Nature began in her patient fashion to recoup. One or two a day sought out the ship's captain or a chaplain. Then a flood. The nurses from the lunar hospital. The WACs from the secretarial pool. The singers from the USO troupe that the One Day's War had stranded. They married gunners, corpsmen, ship's officers, Marines. The ship's tiny chapel became too small and the weddings were held in a vacant compartment which had once held bombs.

Crewmen took the green curtains from the officers' staterooms and hung them on the bare gray-painted walls. A medic and a cook put their heads together and worked over kitchen scraps and manufactured acceptable candles. The only organist in the world pumped the pedals of a wheezy reed organ. And the couples came and went, some weeping at the world's death,

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some laughing at being alive. There was comic relief when Miss Perkins, the vinegary librarian, was led with blushes and giggles down the aisle by an elderly but determined bachelor nuclear physicist. The bomb compartment was jammed to the doors for every wedding. A few of the onlookers wore their drab military working clothes, but most were in dazzling dress uniform, with belts and brass and shoes gleaming in the guttering candlelight. They watched the couples meet and join hands, in a respectful but over-solemn silence. . . .

General Parke gave away his twenty-seventh bride — tradition demanded a suitably aged man in this role, and few old men had come to the Moon — and fidgeted at his twenty-seventh reception in the officers' wardroom. He drank sparingly of the synthetic champagne, said polite but few words, then finally excused himself and went off to his cabin. His aide found him there, sitting at his desk, staring into space while coffee cooled in the cup.

"I beg your pardon, sir —"

Parke looked up. "Oh, come in, Eldred," he said, waving the correct young man to "at ease."

There was silence. The general drank cold coffee and stood up. "Life, Mr. Eldred, as the poet says, is just one damn thing after another." He walked across the polished deck and gazed into a screen which showed the glowing red spark that was Mars. The aide knew better than to speak while his chief was in one of his idea-moods.

Without turning around, the general said, "Lord, that was a responsibility I took back there on the Moon. Maybe I should have stopped the bombardment and given Asia a chance — we're a small raft on a mighty big ocean. . . .

He took his eyes off the red planet. "Mr. Eldred, how many of us are there aboard the *Noah's Ark?*"

The long-faced young aide's reply was immediate and mechanical: "Two thousand four hundred fifty-one, sir. Of these, officer personnel constitute a total of —"

"Never mind about that," Parke interrupted. "I'd like to know how many men and how many women there are."

"Why, uh . . ." Eldred calculated swiftly. "There are twenty-three hundred-odd men and about a hundred and thirty women, sir. . . ." He fell silent a moment. "The figures are 2320 and 131, to be exact. If you wish, sir, I will buzz the personnel office and have them check —"

Parke walked halfway back to the screen, then suddenly whirled and faced his aide. "By heaven, that's a ratio of eighteen to one!" he shouted.

Eldred suppressed his startled look. "Yes, sir," he said, in his usual diffident manner. "The personnel office —"

"*Damn* the personnel office!" the

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general roared, coming forward and jabbing at Eldred's necktie with his forefinger. "Mr. Eldred, what are we going to do about it?"

"Do?" was all Eldred could say. The general almost never asked for advice. "Do about what, sir?"

Parke dropped his hand to his side and frowned. "Mr. Eldred, I suppose it is the Army's fault that men like you lose their ability at simple arithmetic when they are appointed aides to senior officers —" He closed his eyes a moment and shook his head. "I have just been to a wedding," he said. "My twenty-seventh. There have been others — nearly eighty since we blasted off for Mars. It's a fair bet the remaining women aboard will be married off by the time we make planetfall. And now" — his voice rose a little — "will you be so good as to tell me what the two thousand and more men left over are going to do all the rest of their lives?"

Eldred suddenly understood. "Oh," was all he could say. "Why, uh . . . well, I suppose they'll just have to get used to it, sir," he said, primly.

Parke sighed. "'Just have to get used to it,'" he mimicked. "Mr. Eldred, didn't they teach you anything about human nature at OCS? When I issue an order now, I don't have a Pentagon or a White House to back me up. The power that used to back up social conventions went up in the mushroom clouds! The majority of people on this ship don't realize that yet, but when they do —"

Eldred nodded. His face was paler. "You mean — mutiny, sir."

The general shrugged. "Call it that if you wish. There are a few things you can't stop human beings from doing no matter how drastic you make the penalty."

Somewhere a woman screamed.

There was an instant's electric silence in the cabin. Then, quickly in spite of his bulk, Parke was running down the passageway that led out of officer country. He scrambled down a ladder and flung open the door of the vast hydroponics compartment. He looked along the aisle between the chemical tanks with their dense green foliage. Beyond the growing plants another door slammed.

A dark-haired girl sprawled on the metal floor, sobbing. She saw the general and quickly looked down again, one hand moving to hold her torn blouse together.

Parke throttled down the red, stupefied anger in him and spoke gently. "Are you all right?" Unexpectedly, he felt embarrassment. "Did he —"

She shook her head. "Th-thank you, no, I'm all right —" and she broke into a storm of weeping.

Eldred came up quietly. "What is the man's name?" Parke asked.

The girl lifted her tear-streaked face. (*She's lovely*, the old man thought, with a pang.) "I don't know. . . ." Her voice was un-

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believing, like that of a child that is slapped and does not know why. "I only came in here to see real leaves growing green again, and he offered to show me —" and she buried her face in her hands.

The general put his hand gently on her shoulder but she shrank away. "Try to pull yourself together, my dear. We must not let this happen again. Could you identify this man?"

"I think so. He — he was w-wearing a green smock —"

Parke spoke to his aide swiftly, in an undertone. "That will be a hydroponics technician — very probably the one who has the duty in this compartment" — he glanced at his watch — "from eight to twelve. Find him and make the arrest yourself. Quietly."

"Yes, sir." Eldred saluted and turned on his heel. Parke stayed with the girl. He spoke comfortingly; but his mind said, over and over, *eighteen to one — eighteen to one. . . .*

The *Noah's Ark* drove on for days through emptiness. The Earth and Luna dwindled to two bright stars, one blue and one white, that merged into a brilliant blue point. Mars swelled up and showed its red disk, then the polar cap, then the two cosmic dust-flecks which were its satellites.

The twenty-four hundred who were all that remained of humanity gathered in the great dining saloon for orientation lectures on Mars. They played, worked, ate, slept, loafed, talked. When the talk came around to the hydroponics technician who languished in the brig, men looked around to make sure they knew who was listening. Three stern-faced officers conducted the court-martial in the privacy of Parke's cabin, but the twenty-four hundred knew every word that had been said within an hour. Silence settled over the *Noah's Ark*, a cold, strained silence. Then a small procession formed at the brig and marched to the airlock. The great doors opened and closed, and when they opened again a man had died — the first since the end of the One Day's War.

General Parke walked away from the airlock with tottering steps and did not leave his cabin for two days.

The flood of weddings shrank to a trickle and stopped.

Men took down the faded green curtains from the walls of the bomb compartment.

Then life and movement came back to the ship. But it was not as it had been before. There was a great deal of loud talking and considerably more drinking. Men gathered in muttering knots of two or three, and some of those who were newly married began to carry sidearms. Women were more shrill and nervous, and started to quarrel with their husbands. The one-for-all spirit, the frontier camaraderie, that had marked the first days of the *Noah's*

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Ark, was gone, and in its place was the muted discontent that had passed for normality in a prewar suburb.

There were twenty women on the ship who were not yet married. Now, for many hours at a time, they stayed apart from the ship. They talked among themselves, long and earnestly, but the subject of their talks they kept secret. And then one day, matter-of-factly and without previous notice to anyone, a dozen of them moved out of their living space and carried their personal belongings down to a small compartment adjacent to the crew's quarters.

Their leader was the dark-haired beauty on whose account a man had gone to his death in the airlock.

The move was made without a word or gesture to indicate that it was a rebellion. But the men of the *Noah's Ark* knew at once that it was. And the tension that had followed the execution dissolved into frenzied revelry.

The chaplains walked past the crew's quarters and saw the long line of patiently waiting men. At once, they went up and waited on Parke in a body.

The general received them courteously and offered them chairs. But they were too indignant and agitated to sit down.

"What seems to be the trouble, gentlemen?" Parke asked, in the mild tone that could be so irritating to a man in a temper.

They told him.

Parke let out a long, wheezing breath. "I agree," he said. "Perfectly disgraceful, isn't it?" He paused for a long moment. "Now, then, suppose you tell me how I can chase those girls out of there without touching off a mutiny."

Four voices tried to speak at once. Father Pelletier finally got the floor: "We have one hundred and ten new families to protect, General!"

The general rubbed his bald head. "That is exactly what I have tried to do, Father. There are twenty-two hundred men on this ship, however, who are not and cannot be members of those families. Frankly, until this handful of women forced the issue, I didn't give us a chance of avoiding trouble."

"*Avoiding* trouble!" It was the lanky Protestant chaplain, Haynes. "You mean you're going to let this state of affairs go on?"

Parke folded his arms. "I certainly am. Until there are more than this little handful of us in the universe; I am primarily concerned that we *stay alive*. And, gentlemen, a mutiny at this stage would finish us."

"But the end never justifies the means!" Haynes shouted.

Parke did not raise his voice. "No, of course not, Bob," he agreed. "If we had thought of that sooner — say in 1945 — it would not be necessary to make decisions of this kind."

"You're being inconsistent," Rabbi Schwartz interposed. "You

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punished that hydroponics man —"

Parke stood up. "Yes," he said, heavily. "I thought violence and example would work. And I — I was angry." He came out from behind his desk and faced them appealingly. "But it doesn't work, gentlemen. You, of all people on board this ship, should know that. 'They that live by the sword —' " He leaned forward. "I am sick to death of killing. I bought safety for us by bombing Asia, and I bought it again by sending Thorberg through the air lock, and I'm through!" His voice dropped to a low, tired tone. "If you make monks of all those men for the rest of their lives, they'll fight back. They'll take what they consider they've a right to, and if we stop them when they get into *that* mood there will be bloodshed. They will either kill most of the officers or we will kill most of them."

He sank back into his chair. "If you want that to happen, I will deprive these men of their women. I would as soon deprive them of their oxygen."

They saw that the interview was over.

"I cannot approve of this," said Pelletier. "But I will not resist you, General." The others murmured their agreement.

"I'm sorry," said Parke. "Truly, I am. I would have felt and acted as you would have me do — until the day Thorberg walked out to die."

Eldred, who had not spoken a word during the interview, showed them out. As the door closed he turned to the general. "I see what you meant the other day, sir."

Parke managed a faint smile. "We're not out of the woods yet, Mr. Eldred."

"But, if the men are . . . well, satisfied, sir —"

"Satisfied? My God! Would you be satisfied? After a few years? — But that isn't what I mean. Take a look at this."

He opened a drawer and took out a large color photograph. It was still damp from the developing bath. "This was brought to me from the observatory just before you brought the chaplains in."

Eldred studied the sheet in puzzlement. Then his eyes widened. "Why, sir, that gridwork — it looks artificial —"

"Yes. The boys got other prints, but this one was the clearest."

The aide looked frightened. "Does this mean —"

Parke nodded. "I'm certain of it. This is a city, and Mars is inhabited."

Air whistled around the hull of the *Noah's Ark* as it plunged into the thin stratosphere. The ship circled Mars twice while it slowed from interplanetary velocity, and cameras and telescopes were busy. Then it swung down toward the North Pole.

There was surprise at this order. But it was the beginning of the long polar summer day, and there

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were none of the Martian cities within hundreds of miles.

No aircraft rose to meet them as they thundered down over the melting ice cap. The big spaceship handled awkwardly in atmosphere, but the pilot (the only spaceship pilot in the world) knew his trade and brought her down easily in a sandy waste at the edge of a snowfield. They took the mongrel dog — who had, unknowingly, been waiting all his life for this moment — from his cage in the lab and exposed him to the Martian elements, and waited impatiently for many days while bearded Doc Ashley thumped and prodded and took blood smears. Tramp was pronounced clean as a whistle, and then, unafraid of new and unknown disease germs, the men and women of Earth set foot on the gritty surface of Mars.

The land was cold and sad, even in the long polar noonday. Years ago, on Annapurna and K-2 and Everest, men had learned the final limitations of human biology, and the air that blew in gusts over icy Mars had only one-third the density of the air that blew through the South Col. So the people of the *Noah's Ark* had to wear compressors on their backs and masks on their faces in order to breathe that thin air, and they had to wear heated clothing against its Antarctic bite. And yet, their spirits were lifted. For men could feel and hear this air in motion against them. They could call to each other without the use of radio. They could look up and see colored clouds and a ghostly aurora. They could stoop down and make snowballs. Mars had wind, and water, and sound, and the Moon had had none of these things.

The people lived in the *Noah's Ark*, which towered above the ice like a vast apartment house, but they came out and spent their working hours in the Martian outdoors. They cut into the red, harsh soil — it was almost pure ferrous oxide — and carried it in to be smelted, for civilized communities use much iron. They shoveled snow into storage compartments, so that less of the ship's economy would need to be diverted to purifying water. They dug up the coarse, deep-rooted gray-green weed that was springing up in the damp ground behind the melting snow, and they studied these Martian plants to learn whether they could be made edible. The people of the *Noah's Ark* were busy, and building, and therefore happy — and then one of them was found without his mask, face down in the snow.

Four senior officers came and turned him over and looked at him.

"Suicide?" one asked.

Doctor Ashley shook his head. "Foul play," he said, and pointed, *there*, and *there*, the small physical telltales that a doctor knows.

"Who's going to tell his wife?"

General Parke looked at the officer sharply. "You say this man was married?"

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"For two weeks, General."

Parke sighed. "Then we'll mark time on our investigation. When his widow remarries, we will have a suspect."

"*Really*, General!"

"Certainly," the old man retorted. "Even on Earth this kind of thing used to happen every day. And the way things are now . . ." He trailed off into uncertainty. Then, snapping into military decisiveness again: "Carry on, gentlemen. I'm going to the ship to write out an order of the day."

And another step in the social history of man was taken.

The order of the day made sound military sense. If Mars had cities, some kind of reconnaissance of them was essential. So the general organized four exploratory parties, each five hundred strong, and made ready to march into the Martian unknown. But exploration was not the reason why Parke had written out the order.

Eldred looked at the typewritten sheets with surprise. "You're leaving all the married couples with the ship."

The general shifted in his chair. "Naturally. Their protection is our first priority."

His aide had learned much in the past few weeks. "Protection from the hypothetical Martian, of course," he said, with a short smile.

"Of course." They both knew what he meant.

"What are you going to do with the" — Eldred hesitated — "with the unmarried women?" He did not wish to dignify them with the name they had begun to give themselves, the Free Companions.

Parke was silent for a long time. He was thinking of practices of the armies of ancient Greece and modern Russia. "The in-group feeling of those girls is amazing," he said, half to himself. "There were twelve of them at the start. There are twenty, now. So there haven't been any more weddings. Father Pelletier and Doc Ashley have tried to talk with a few — sell them the stability of home and family, providing for their old age, and so on — but they keep turning the conversation back to Thorberg's execution. You can see they've all made up their minds not to get married."

"Women's minds often change, sir —"

"Tommyrot. Half the misunderstandings between men and women come from clichés like that. Women can stick to a decision like grim death when they think security's at stake — and it is, Mr. Eldred! Oh, Lord, it is!"

He stood up. "You know, Abe Lincoln once said, 'I do not claim to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me.' Well, I feel like that now. Mr. Eldred, redraft the orders and assign five of those girls to each of the four marching columns. And" — he drew a long breath and stepped over the hairline between

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the unlawful and the merely unconventional — "classify them on the muster lists as 'Free Companions.' It's not such a bad name. . . ."

Pale, cold polar sunshine highlighted the silvery sides of the *Noah's Ark*, a pointing finger against the dark purple sky. Four long rectangles of marching men moved out from the ship and from each other over the sand and snow. The shouting and waving of handkerchiefs ceased, and the men and women who were left behind went soberly back to work. From a nation of soldiers, the remnant of mankind were now become a nation of soldiers and civilians. And the soldiers were a Foreign Legion, banished over the horizon to safeguard their country. . . .

A monstrous steel juggernaut clanked on caterpillar treads at the head of each column. They would need the lavish surplus of electric power from its atomic engines to heat their tents and power their air compressors. Moreover the soldiers felt a lift of confidence to see it swaying and roaring up there ahead of them, ready to meet any challenge with its stubby rocket guns. They marched in the long, floating gait that Mars permits a man even under a full field pack, their faces nightmarish and goggling in the oxygen masks.

Under Martian gravity an army could march seventy miles a day and be ready for fight at the end of it. And on this wide, nearly level treeless waste, the old-fashioned maneuvers were revived. The five hundred marched in column with scouts, flankers, advance guard and rear guard. And when they halted for the night, they staked their tents in such a way that if attacked they could quickly form a hollow square. Military history had taken a long step backward from the hydrogen bomb, but on Earth armies like this had once smashed empires. Many a sergeant watched the ranks swinging past and said to himself, "God help the Martians."

Column One, under General Parke's personal command, marched directly south over the icy sands for four days. Seventy miles a day, in a north-south direction on Mars, is nearly two full degrees of Martian latitude. Four days of marching — almost eight degrees to the south of the *Noah's Ark* — was enough to leave the flashing snowfields far behind. The land was now covered with still, cold lakes, the color of the dark sky they reflected. On their banks the gray-green weed grew fresh and rank in the weak sunshine.

Beyond the lakes the land rose in low hills covered with a rust-brown shrub. Parke called a day's halt and sent the scouts ahead to reconnoiter. On impulse, men improvised hooks and lines and waded out from the shore in their watertight clothes. They laughed and shouted when they discovered that

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there actually were things that looked like small fishes, darting in the cold water among straw-colored reeds. This lake would be gone by the end of the long Martian summer, but in the meantime it was a touch of the home planet, and for the first time in many weeks men were able to think of Earth with a smile.

The scouts reported back in the evening, and the next day — the sixth out from the *Noah's Ark* — the column marched another seventy miles. They were perhaps a thousand feet higher when they camped, in a boulder-strewn pass surrounded by higher, snow-covered hills that were the time-worn remnant of a Martian mountain range. Thin, scrubby trees almost as tall as a man grew here, and a sentry shot a small armored mammal which Doc Ashley confiscated for study. Mars was old and cold, but it was alive. The soldiers remembered the telephotographs of the cities and checked the condition of their rifles.

The advance slowed now as the army crossed the crest of the range, wary of ambush. They came down into a bleak, barren plain of sand and rock, broken only by the line of trees that leaned over the bank of a stream. They left their direct southward line of march and followed its course for two days. Dry in the summer and fall, probably, but brim-full now of dark water from the melting snow, the stream swung in long curves over the plain, dropped over a low ledge in twin waterfalls, raced down a slanting slab into a deep pool, broadened and slowed — and at the end of the eighth day's march they saw it flowing into a gaunt gray forest and out again, and under the arch of a high stone wall.

Beyond the wall, slim towers rose in cubist ranks, like an attenuated New York or Chicago, except that they had no windows.

Five hundred miles from the *Noah's Ark*, almost exactly on the Arctic Circle, this was the northernmost city on Mars.

The tents were staked down in a grove of spiky trees. The men lined up at the field kitchen with no horseplay and little talk. The tank roared and clattered back to high ground just within accurate range of the city and the tank crew settled down to wait, while the smoky Martian sunset stained the armored craft's high metal flanks. In the brief Arctic summer night Parke sent volunteers to the city wall, and waited impatiently in his tent, an electric lantern burning.

The scouts returned in the glimmer of icy dawn, their footsteps loud on the withered dry spike-leaves under the trees.

"What did you find?" the general demanded.

"N-n-nothing, sir." The man's teeth chattered under his mask. Even in a heated suit, there is an infinite difference between Mars by day and Mars by night.

Parke called into the tent: "El-

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dred! Bring these men some coffee." Then, to the scout: "Nothing, did you say?"

"No, sir — no traffic and no lights, anywhere. Ah, thanks." He took the tin cup from the sleepy aide, pushed up his mask and drank. "We went all around the walls — the city's a perfect square, sir, about two and a half miles on a side. Smallest buildings on the outside, nearest the wall — four stories or so — then rising up to skyscrapers in the center. Only — no windows, sir. The wall goes all the way around, and the river comes out under another arch just like the one on this side —"

Parke's mind was racing swiftly. His fingers nervously fumbled a roll of paper out onto the floor of his tent. "Well done, men. Come in and tie that tent flap, and help yourselves to coffee." He reached for a pencil. "Now, if you'll sketch me a map of the city —"

The sun rose over the thorn trees and the white rime faded from the ground. Soldiers came out of the tents, dipped up icy river water, downed field rations, inspected their weapons. Orders passed in low, laconic voices. One company mustered in the forest as a ready reserve; half of another moved back to cover the tank. The rest of the little army marched on the city.

The operation was smooth, swift, a tactician's dream. Assault boats made of sewn and inflated tents shoved off from the river bank, ungainly and bulging with men, and swept with the current under the gray stone arch into the city. On the other sides, soldiers scrambled up and over the walls. The army floated in boats or marched down the iron canyon-streets to the city's center, where the river opened into a great square pool that glistened deep blue in the early morning sun. The troops of Earth hurried from all sides to the broad flagstoned walks, and the thin air vibrated to their cheers.

The sun rose higher and the city remained cold and silent, and the cheers died away in the stone and iron emptiness.

There was no enemy. The city was deserted.

Stones half as tall as a man had fallen away from the foundation of one of the great buildings that loomed in windowless blankness around the pool. They had fallen enough to let a man step inside. General Parke snapped on his flashlight and the beam vanished in dusty gloom.

"I thought we'd decided Mars was inhabited," said Eldred, behind him.

"I was right," said Parke, "and wrong. Mars *was* inhabited."

He stepped under the jagged ruin of the wall and pointed his flash beam this way and that in the darkness —

"*Look out!*"

A body slammed into the general

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and knocked him down. There was a roar of flame and a shape fell fluttering out of the dark. Many feet tramped in and out, and men hauled out into the light an ungainly Something with tallow-colored, scaly wings.

Parke got up out of the rubble and looked around for the soldier who had knocked him out of the line of fire and saved his life. With a start, he remembered the voice and realized that the soldier was a Free Companion.

Men stood around the beast from the building, staring at the long wings, the whiplash tail, the large opaque eyes.

"So that's what the Martians look like," said a soldier, and added a round Army curse.

Doc Ashley shook his head authoritatively. "It's not a Martian," he said.

"It'll do for a starter until one comes along!" another man exclaimed.

The doctor pointed. "No. Look at the braincase. *This* didn't build the city. It's just a buzzard that roosted here after — after whatever happened," he finished in a low tone, and looked at the general. "What do you think?"

Parke spread his hands helplessly.

There was silence among the men by the pool.

Far off, echoing among the buildings, a shout!

A murmuring stirred the ranks of the Army of Earth. Soon men came running. The little corporal in the lead stumbled in his excitement and fell. He got to his knees and saw the star insignia on Parke's uniform, and he called, in a high, cracked voice, "General! — They're here!"

Another man passed the corporal, coming in great bounds under Mars gravity. His breath ebbed and flowed in rasping labor and he could only choke out the one word: "Martians!"

"*Where?*" Parke and three other men exclaimed almost in chorus.

The man's whole body fought for breath — even with a compressor one does not run hard for long distances on Mars. Dumbly, he pointed in the direction from which he had come. "How many?"

The corporal got to his feet. "One." His voice was laughing and crying at the same time. "Back there in a little yard, in a patch of yellow sand under some of the spike trees. And, oh, general, she was beautiful . . . !"

"*She?*" Parke felt surprise, unbelief — and then, as he heard the growing buzz of the men, pity.

"Not one of the Free Companions?" asked Doc Ashley, quietly.

The corporal shook his head vigorously in the goggled mask. "No, sir. Couldn't have been, in this air. This *had* to be a Martian —"

"She didn't have no clothes on," the other man said.

Parke and the doctor looked at each other.

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Ashley stepped closer and murmured in the general's ear, "Hallucination."

Desire, and unacknowledged hope, and eight days' march through a new and unreal-seeming world. And then, a trick of tawny sunlight and shadow and sand in the wind . . .

"Form searching parties! Find her!" the general barked.

"Yes, *sir!*" And in a growing hubbub of excitement and anticipation the army began to leave the square.

The little corporal lingered. "What'll we do if we don't find her, sir?"

"Of course we'll find her! If we have to, we'll take this city apart stone by stone."

The corporal went off to join the shouting men, and Ashley said, evenly, "Now what in hell is the idea, general?"

"Why, the idea is that there are human beings on Mars," Parke answered in his mildest tone.

"But there aren't!" Ashley shouted.

"It's perfectly logical, doctor. We have found plants, trees, higher animals" — he waved at the dead scaly thing — "cities —"

Ashley's voice was cold. "I am a physician and a biologist, general."

Parke clapped a hand to the doctor's shoulder. "And a damn good one," he said. "Good enough to know that any living thing tries to cure itself of its own disorders. Our colony's ailment is — let's say — a certain mathematical disproportion in its membership. The colony is spontaneously seeking a cure."

"You don't expect those searching parties to find anything."

"No, doctor. But they will create a legend. We know now that these plants and animals are edible, so that with the help of atomic power we can live off the country. So we will march on to the next city. This one *could* simply have been abandoned, you know — we are pretty far north here, even for Mars —"

"But you don't believe that, general!"

"No."

There were shouts and laughter in the distance as men entered a building.

Parke spoke in a hard, brusque tone. "Ashley, you will go to the tank and report to the other three exploratory columns that we have made contact with the Martians. On your way you will speak to my aide and tell him to find that corporal and send him to the tank to tell his story in his own words over the radio. That is an order."

Ashley swallowed. "Yes, sir. And you have my resignation as your officer. Effective as soon as this expedition is over, sir."

"As soon as it is over," Parke acknowledged calmly. "But that may not be for many years —"

The doctor sputtered incoherently.

"— at least until the folks at the *Noah's Ark* have had a fair start at

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raising their kids," the general finished.

The doctor stood there.

"I'm sorry, Jack," said the general.

Silence.

"*Is it worse to lie than to murder?*"

"All right, general."

The physician walked away slowly, with his shoulders down. The cold, thin wind blew around Moses Parke and he moved from the frigid shadow of the buildings into the sunlight by the pool.

He did not see the sunlight. He saw the mushroom clouds rising over Earth, endless months ago.

There were no Martians now. He was sure of that. And it was well, for twenty-four hundred people could not fight a race that lived in great cities. But the promise and the uncertainty would move the soldiers to march, if need be, from end to end of Mars. Not because of abstract military security but because two men believed they had seen a woman naked in the sun.

Man needed illusions to hold his brawling society together. He had lost them, and in the emptiness that followed he had almost committed suicide. Now he had found a new one — and it was neither better nor worse than most of the illusions for which armies on Earth had fought and marched and died. . . .

In the loneliness of command General Parke saw a soldier coming toward him.

"Not going hunting?" said Parke.

"No."

He placed the voice. It was the Free Companion whose quick action had spared him from the Thing in the ruined building.

"There aren't any Martians, are there, General?" Her tone was light, challenging, gently mocking.

"Why — why —" He felt the edges of the illusion tatter. The Free Companions would not believe the corporal's story. Of course.

"Are you going to tell the men?" she asked.

Parke hesitated. "No," he said at last.

"I understand," she said, and great relief spread over him like a blanket. Yes. A woman would understand. Some women. Like a young man he found himself wondering what she looked like under the grim oxygen mask and the quilted uniform.

"I don't believe I have thanked you for saving my life this morning."

"There's a better way you can thank me," she said softly.

The wind rippled the surface of the pool.

General Parke felt touched — flattered — and younger by many years. He felt sudden, deep gratitude as he realized that the girl was offering him forgiveness for the death of Thorberg.

"I'm old enough to be your father," he said.

"And I'm old enough to be a Free Companion," she answered.

General Parke sighed and relaxed

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into the new folkways that Man had created since the home world died. Hand in gloved hand, they walked through the silent old streets back to the camp.

Mars turned in its Earth-length day, and the bright, shrunken sun struck through the tent flap into Parke's eyes. The general stirred from his drowse and moved just enough to be out of the light. The air in the tent seemed stale, and he reached across to the oxygen valve. It was then he realized he was alone.

He sat up, awake, filling with uncontrollable small-boy resentment. Then he slumped back in his sleeping bag. Why, of course, you old fool, he told himself, warily. You're the commanding general, but to one of *them* you're only one man among five hundred. Others are waiting.

The knowledge brought no satisfaction. "Damn it, rank *has* its privileges," he mumbled, aloud — and at once, in merciless honesty, came the cold thought: *it's not going to work*. Sooner or later it will hit us all the same way.

How long would this army's woman-myth hold up? A year? Two years? Five years?

A week?

Call Eldred, call the chaplain, call Ashley, do something!

Do what? The hell with it.

The air mattress hissed as he turned over. Martian air, not Terrestrial, he thought irrelevantly, and he remembered the Free Companion in a rush of tenderness and strange sorrow.

Life is good. A hell of a thing if we throw it away now just *because* it is good.

Laura. A nice name. Funny, he'd been so busy hopping from crisis to crisis he didn't know the names of any of the others, or even what they looked like, or —

No. We're not going to throw life away. The conviction seeped into him, slowly and certainly, a still small voice with faint echoes of wind and fire.

In an ancient kingdom a man under sentence of death had won a year's reprieve by promising to teach the king's horse how to fly. For, he had reasoned, in a year the king may die; or the horse may die; or, who knows, maybe I *can* teach that horse to fly.

And the years are longer on Mars. . . .

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Still resolutely refusing to write one story that resembles another, Mildred Clingerman turns to the memories of her own childhood, and from that well-spring draws as fresh and clear a draft of imagination as even she has yet proffered us.

Mr. Sakrison's Halt

by MILDRED CLINGERMAN

IN THOSE DAYS THE OLD KATY LOCAL was the magic carpet that transported me from one world to another. Summertime only truly began the moment the conductor lifted me aboard and urged me to "set still and be a big girl." He was never impressed with the fact that I'd been traveling two days all alone and on much bigger trains than the Katy. When he had asked after my mother and told me how anxiously my grandparents were awaiting my arrival, he'd pass on down the aisle to mysterious regions forward, and I'd be left to spy all about the coach for Miss Mattie Compton.

As often as not, there was no sign of Miss Mattie, and the only other occupants would be somnolent old men in alpaca coats who roused now and then to use the spittoons. Usually her absence meant simply that the conductor had not yet found time to eject her bodily from the Jim Crow car, but sometimes I was forced to conclude that she was resting at home that day. At such times my disappointment would be intense. And while the Katy huffed and rattled past the cotton fields and muttered gloomily over the shady creeks, I had nothing to do but hold myself steady on the slick straw seat and stretch my eyes wide to keep awake.

But mostly I was fortunate enough to catch the Katy on one of Miss Mattie's days. I'd see just the tip of a pink ribbon bobbing over the top of the high seat, and I'd hurry down the car to slide in beside her. Or perhaps the door to the coach would open and Mr. McCall, the conductor, would appear with Miss Mattie in his arms. She would be hanging as limply as a bit of old mosquito netting, staring sweetly into Mr. McCall's annoyed red face. He'd plump her down beside me and then, accommodating himself to the Katy's swaggering roll, slam out of our car again without a word.

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Miss Mattie and I never bothered with formal greetings. The bond between us was so well-established that we always took up again just where we'd left off the year before. She might sometimes call me by my mother's name instead of my own, but I didn't mind. (It was such a pretty name.) Almost immediately, out of the confused, jackdaw clutter of her conversation, her recognition of our shared dedication would emerge, and once again we'd plunge deeply into talk of Mr. Sakrison. Interruptions were frequent, as frequent as the Katy's stops along the line. When the Katy squealed jerkily to a halt and sat there panting, we'd press our noses against the dirty window (with its heaped up piles of coal dust along the sill) and stare silently at the scene outside. Then, for a little while after each of the stops, I'd have to pat Miss Mattie's hands till she stopped whimpering.

Miss Mattie was pretty when she wasn't whimpering. Her face was soft and pink with fine little crumpled lines, and her blue eyes were younger than the rest of her. Sometimes when she was telling over and over again about Mr. Sakrison's strange disappearance in that young chirruping voice, I would forget that Miss Mattie was close to sixty years old.

She always wore little crocheted white gloves that somehow lent an air of dignity to the rest of her ill-assorted costume. "Outlandish," people termed Miss Mattie's get-ups. She mixed the styles of thirty years back with anything modish that took her fancy. In order to take Miss Mattie's fancy a piece of wearing apparel had only to be pink and fluffy. Chapel Grove's inhabitants never forgot the day Miss Mattie appeared with a pair of pink "teddies" pinned to her gray curls. The wispy bit of lingerie hung gracefully and shamelessly behind her poor addled head for all the louts in town to see, and they followed her to her door taunting her with ugly words.

In the main, Chapel Grove treated Miss Mattie kindly enough. She was even pointed out to visitors. But nobody ever bothered to hide the grinning and nudging that broke out wherever she appeared. There were humorists, too, who liked to josh her about Mr. Sakrison, saying rude, insulting things of him, till Miss Mattie collapsed into a damp, sobbing little heap at their feet. At such times I suffered a queer, ill-defined conviction that Chapel Grove would like to make me cry, also. Beneath the surface kindness I sensed their suspicion that I was, in some way, as different as Miss Mattie. Even my grandparents thought it was too bad that I must grow up elsewhere, and everybody smiled at my alien "accent." No matter how joyfully each summer I threw myself into the very heart of all the youthful activities there, I was aware of a subtle reserve that kept me circling just outside the true center. (Didn't they realize I

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belonged? Why, I'd been born there! . . . But so had Miss Mattie.)

Miss Mattie and I were both made to feel Chapel Grove's disapproval of those who do too much traveling around. Several times each year she went all the way to the State Capitol to ask the railroad officials there to help her locate Mr. Sakrison. But most of her journeys were made up to the city where one transferred to the Katy for the last four hours of the trip to Chapel Grove. The Katy rattled up there mornings and returned in the late afternoon. At least twice each week Miss Mattie boarded her for the round trip. Once arrived, Miss Mattie usually just stayed on board, if the trainmen would let her. She had no interest in the city at all. It was the journey back and forth that was important.

On the last journey we shared, the conductor did not lift me aboard the Katy or tell me to be a big girl. I was a big girl. At least I thought I was. I certainly towered over tiny Miss Mattie, and I was very conscious of the hard little buds that were my breasts — half-ashamed and half-proud of the way they strained under the tight voile dress.

Miss Mattie was having one of her rare "clear" spells. She called me by my own name and traced for me, through mazy genealogical thickets, her fourth cousinship to my mother. This didn't startle me; one way or another I was related to everybody in the county. But I was startled and disappointed to hear her talking like all the other adults I knew. She seemed tired, too, and I was suddenly shaken by a dreadful fear that one day soon she'd give up her search and admit defeat.

"Oh, Miss Mattie, please," I said, "tell me about Mr. Sakrison."

She turned to look at me, and I almost cried out when I saw she was cringing as if I were one of the town bullies eager to strike the poisonous blow. I stared back at her till the tears spilled down my cheeks.

"You've grown so tall," she whispered. "I was afraid . . ."

Both of us wept openly then with a great flutter of white handkerchiefs, and afterwards I was glad to see that the weary, grown-up look had faded from her eyes. With our heads very close together and Miss Mattie's hand in mine, she told me the story again for the last time.

"You remember, my dear — I've told you so often — he had the loveliest instincts. I never knew a Yankee could be anything but a *beast*, but he was so kind, so gentle . . . I didn't mean to fall in love with him. They say such horrid things about traveling men, 'specially Yankee traveling men. He walked me home from church that night. Wouldn't come in, since I was — to Chapel Grove's way of thinking — living alone in that big house. But he kissed me. . . . We stood under that old catalpa tree, you know, the one. He hugged me

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so hard he crushed the roses I was wearing, and the smell of the bruised petals hung over us like a fog. We made our plans and I packed all night. Had every nigra in the house pressing and mending . . . The night went so quickly, and all of us were happy, calling back and forth and singing snatches of songs.

"Early in the morning I put on my pink organdy and Mr. Sakrison called for me and we caught the Katy to go up to the city for the wedding. It was a delirious kind of morning. I've never known the Katy to slide so smoothly along. There was something different, too, about the way the sunlight slanted across the fields. I remember thinking that if I could shift those long shadows just a fraction, the way you do a vase full of roses, I'd see a lovely new view. And there was a new, wonderful taste to the air and even to the coffee I'd put up for us!

"After a while we both felt quieter inside and Mr. Sakrison held my hand and talked of all his hopes for the future. Not just our future, either. He spoke his piece for the whole world. I was so proud of him. I'd never heard anybody speak so sadly about the nigras — their want and their fear. They were picking in the fields that day, I recall. . . . He put words to the little sick feelings I'd had at times, and I began to catch his vision . . . some of it, but not all. Not then."

The Katy whistled long and mournfully. Miss Mattie interrupted herself with "Hush!" and pressed her nose against the window to see if this, at last, was the station she'd been hunting for all those years. But it wasn't.

"You see," she said, "I was too happy to know or care which halt it was. The Katy would stop, as it always does, at every cow pasture almost. Sometimes Mr. Sakrison would swing off to light his cigar, though I never minded the odor of cigars. . . . Delicious, isn't it? But he said the scent caught in my hair, and he couldn't have that. He said my hair smelled of breezes in the springtime. . . . And then the Katy stopped at the dearest little halt! We had been aboard about two hours, I think, so it would have been almost halfway to the city. I had never noticed the place before, but then I hadn't been to the city often.

"The first thing that caught my eye was a huge camellia bush in full bloom, a red one. The fallen petals had heaped up in a ring around it, you know the way they do. I asked Mr. Sakrison to step off and cut one of the blossoms for me with his pocket knife. I didn't think the station master would mind, and there wouldn't be time enough to ask politely. But the queerest thing! The Katy just sat and huffed and puffed for the longest spell, it seemed. And things outside moved slow as molasses. There was a park with a little blue lake, and swans dipping their heads . . . and children

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playing. Ever so many children, and all so nicely dressed, even the little darkies. There were adults strolling there, too, all mixed in together, all colors. I wasn't a bit surprised, somehow, but I wondered at the slow, graceful movement of the scene. It was like grasses waving under water.

"Then I noticed the station itself. It was a funny little brick, octagonal building. Over the door to the waiting room it didn't say WHITE, you know. It said: WAITING ROOM. ONE AND ALL. And then, while Mr. Sakrison was still cutting the blossom, out of the station house came a colored gentleman. He walked up to Mr. Sakrison and pounded him on the back and they shook hands, and I thought to my soul they were going to embrace. . . ." Miss Mattie paused and bit her lips and twisted her hand from mine.

"Do you know, that made me angry? I looked hard at Mr. Sakrison, and for a moment he looked like any other Yankee . . . a total stranger. It was the anger that kept me sitting there staring instead of joining him. I wouldn't feel angry now. Even then — I like to remember — I fought it down and called and waved to him. But he only looked around in a puzzled kind of way . . . and walked off into the park with the man. The Katy started up again with a terrible crashing sound and fairly flew away from there.

"I was looking back, you know, and trying to reach the emergency cord . . . and weeping. I saw just the first few letters on the station sign. It said 'B R O' something. In the city I waited and waited, but Mr. Sakrison didn't come. They told me the only halt between Chapel Grove and the city that had the letters B R O was Brokaw. I hired a buggy and drove back there, but it was only a tumble-down old halt without a station house — just one of those sheltered seats. . . ."

Miss Mattie always stopped her story at this point, as she did now. Again we murmured over all the pleasant names we could think of that the halt might have possessed. As usual Miss Mattie argued strongly for her favorite. But I didn't think the word *Brotherhood* was pretty enough. While we talked I was recalling the rest of the story — the part of it I knew from a different viewpoint. Chapel Grove's version was that the Yankee traveling man had meant to fool her from the start. She had probably given him money, they said. Her folks had left her a great pile of it. And (here they pulled down their mouths) he never had any intention of marrying her and had escaped at the first opportunity. Miss Mattie had come home then and shut herself up for months. When she did show her face again it was the silly, addled face she wore now. Look at the crazy things she did — like riding the Katy up and down the

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line for thirty years almost every day, looking for the halt that swallowed Mr. Sakrison!

In the long gloaming that day the Katy made many halts, and I stared fiercely with Miss Mattie in utmost concentration at each one, hoping we'd recognize *something* to tell us this one was BRO.

Sure enough, we found it. It was I who spied the swans, so white in the dusk, but it was Miss Mattie who saw the camellia bush and the man who waited beside it. When the Katy stopped Miss Mattie was off as quick as a wink, but she needn't have hurried, because the Katy just stood breathing there for a long time. I saw a petal on the camellia bush fall and fall — forever it seemed — before it touched the ground. I saw Miss Mattie leaning on the man's arm, and they turned and he waved his straw hat at me, slow as slow. And, oh, Mr. Sakrison was lovely . . . but so was Miss Mattie. She was young and plumped out, especially in the bosom, and I was suddenly ashamed and crossed my arms over my chest. I was watching the swans arching their necks when the Katy started up again very quickly as if she were getting away under full steam. Only then did I remember to look for the station sign, but I was too late.

In Chapel Grove that summer it was a nine days' wonder the way poor old Mattie Compton had stepped off the Katy and disappeared without a trace. Since I was the last person who saw her, I was forced to tell again and again the dull facts of how the Katy stopped at a station whose name I neglected to notice, and of how Miss Mattie got off there and didn't get back on board. That was all I reported. Grandmother finally put a stop to the questions with her appeal to the ladies that I was "at that delicate age," and Miss Mattie's disappearance had upset me.

It hadn't, of course.

But there were things in Chapel Grove that year that did upset me. Most nights I saw the fiery cross burning on schoolhouse hill. Grandfather went about tight-lipped and angry, cursing "flap-mouthed fools." I lay awake sometimes and listened to the hounds baying down in the bottom-lands, and I wished with all my heart for money enough to ride the Katy every day, up and back, till I found the halt called B R O. There, I'd run, run and be gathered to Mr. Sakrison's heart . . . and Miss Mattie's.

The Katy local was retired years ago. There's a fine highway now to the city, and they say everybody in Chapel Grove drives there often since it's so near. I hear everything has changed. But I read in my newspaper last week how they've locked the doors to the schoolhouse and barred with guns and flaring anger the way to the hill, and I realize how terribly far Chapel Grove still is from Mr. Sakrison's halt.

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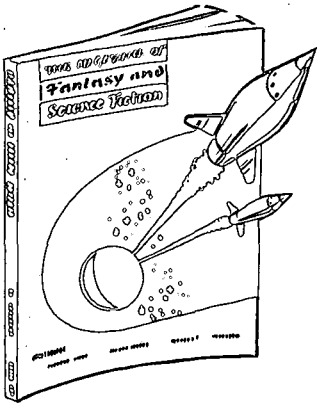

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